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Breaking the silence: New immigrant children affected by war trauma. Community needs and resources assessment

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Breaking the Silence:

New Immigrant Children Affected by War Trauma

Community Needs and Resources Assessment

By

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THESIS
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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to provide a basis for and facilitate the development of strategies and programs based on actual life experiences of the refugee families and their children and on present needs and resources in the Kitchener-Waterloo community. The participants in the study included three refugee families and their children from Somalia, Kurdistan and Bosnia, English as a Second Language teachers, cultural assistants (settlement counsellors), and a local community group. Qualitative data obtained from the participants were complemented with demographic characteristics relevant to the phenomenon of war trauma among children in the K-W Region. The qualitative data showed that the impact of war and political persecution, refugee flight, and resettlement experience embody a number of stress-promoting and stress-buffering factors that shape the outcome of war trauma. An ecological integration of the phenomenon of war trauma was endorsed as a preferable theoretical framework that actualizes the contribution of individual, micro- and exosystemic factors to the war trauma outcomes. All data sources generated recommendations for community action. The findings will be used to inform the existing community group of suggested action steps that outline several ecological levels of intervention.

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Preface

My work with the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program of the K-W area has extended for the past three years. Throughout this time I have heard numerous stories of the ordeal of newcomer refugee families. However, my colleagues and I have rarely heard anything on children's experiences of the war, refugee flight, or settlement in Canada. That may be explained by several reasons. One is that we, like many other service providers, tend to focus on the settlement of adults, assuming that by assisting them, their children will get appropriate care. Second, children indeed do well in most cases. They adjust easily to the new environment and early on begin to enjoy positive aspects of the new environment. They also learn language so quickly that sometimes we have to deal with the reversal of roles within the family. Finally, the literature on refugee children teaches us that adults have a tendency to neglect or minimize harmful effects of war trauma on their children (Terr, 1983). The same seems to apply to organizations, programs and institutions of society, which also focus all their efforts on responding to existing problems rather than developing prevention strategies. Unfortunately, children will rarely speak of their experiences if they are not asked. Even when they do speak of them, it may be in a way that does not invite us to listen.

The focus on children started in the K-W community when a coordinator of one of the English as a Second Language (ESL) programs shared her insights into refugee children in the school's day care centre with a community activist involved in multicultural issues. Although the ESL coordinator was a non-professional observer, she was able to sense their pain, anger and fear. The community activist approached several agencies and individuals to obtain their input on the issue and identify their interest in potential action. Luckily, all of the approached people showed considerable sensitivity and responsiveness, so a coalition of agencies and individuals was formed to address issues of children affected by war trauma. The invitation to join this initiative came to me when I was

finalizing my decision to focus on refugee children in my thesis work. I have been fortunate to be part of this community action from its earliest stages. My involvement with this group has complemented the research process. The fact that it has often been hard for me to distinguish my role as a researcher from my role in the community assures me that both this project and I are on the right route.

My own motivation to get involved with this project stems from one other source as well. Although not having personal refugee experience, I perceive the move of my own family to Canada as being forced by political developments in the former Yugoslavia. Experiencing resettlement after making such a decision added a lot to my understanding of the issues new immigrants and refugees face. Finally, and most importantly, I still have not fulfilled my need to comprehend the incomprehensible when it comes to the suffering of innocent people and to seek ways to alleviate the harm that has been done to them.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An Overview of Canadian Immigration

Approximately 240,000 people land in Canada as immigrants every year (Into the 21st Century, 1994). This number includes two major categories of newcomers: **immigrants** and **refugees** (Facts and Figures, 1994). Although both have the same status in Canada (permanent residents or landed immigrants, according to the classification of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration), these two categories differ with respect to the way people qualify to enter Canada. Out of the total of 240,000 immigrants, by far the largest number (about 50%) come sponsored by their immediate or extended family members (A Broader Vision, 1994). About 43% of the new immigrants in 1995 were admitted to Canada on the basis of the country's economic interest. These people are usually required to qualify on the basis of their age, knowledge of language and occupation, in order to be granted residency status. In addition, a smaller percentage (5-7%) of persons from this category are admitted to the country on the basis of their economic investment capacities. Even smaller numbers (2-5%) are granted residency as retirees, or as "live-in care givers" (A Broader Vision, 1994). In most cases the preceding categories of immigrants arrive after careful and well advanced planning. On the other hand, every year, about 25,000 to 35,000 newcomers to Canada do not experience the immigration process in such a planned way. These individuals are admitted to the country under "refugee status" (Berry, 1988).

Refugees in Canada

Most authors and government policies consider refugees to be people who are displaced from their place of origin, often destitute, and who fled from either war or political prosecution in their native countries (Ahearn & Athey,1991; Berry, 1991; Williams & Westermeyer, 1986).

According to the definition of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Into the 21st Century, 1994), "convention refugee" means any person who

> ...by reason of well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion: is outside the country of the person's nationality and is unable or by reason of that fear, is unwilling to avail himself to the country; not having a country of nationality, is outside the country of the person's former habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of that fear is unwilling to return to that country. (Into the 21st Century, 1994, p.46)

Probably the most important characteristic of refugee immigration is the fact that these people are "forced" to resettle instead of being allowed to make a conscious decision to do so. A large number of these people, therefore, feel that coming to Canada was not their decision, that they were "pushed out," "brought" here, and therefore have little control over their settlement (Beiser, Turner & Ganesan, 1989; Berry, 1991; Disman, 1988; Edwards, 1989; Williams, 1980). The percentage of refugees in the overall number of immigrants to Canada has ranged from 10-15% in the past three years, and it is projected that this trend will remain the same in years to come (A Broader Vision, 1994).

Canadian Refugee Policy and Practice

Canada does not have a long history of accepting refugees. Officially, refugee intake started in the early 1980s when this category of immigration was added to economic immigrants. Over the 15 year history of the private sponsorship program (i.e., humanitarian organizations, churches, service clubs and private citizens sponsoring refugee settlement in Canada), more than 155,000 refugees and members of designated classes have been brought to resettle in Canada. This type of sponsorship is, however, only providing about 15-20% of all the refugee intake at this time. The remaining 80-85% of refugees qualify to resettle in Canada through other forms of sponsorship, or by going through the refugee determination process. If turned into figures, this means that over the past 15 years, Canada has accommodated between 750,000 and 1,000,000 refugees. In addition, some other categories of immigration may include refugees like "family,"

"assisted relative" and even "economic" class. This is, for example, the case when well established immigrants or Canadian citizens decide to sponsor their family members who have declared refugee status in countries overseas. These potential newcomers will not be labeled as "convention refugees" but either "family class" or "assisted relative" immigrants. In this case, people who are in fact refugees formally become immigrants. For example, people from Vietnam, Bosnia, and Kurdistan may fall into these categories although it is a common knowledge that many if not all of them suffered some form of persecution. Therefore, the assumption can be made that the number of people who have suffered some form of persecution may be greatly underestimated.

The Refugee Plan, issued by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration for the years 1996-2000, is giving special consideration and advantage to women and children to resettle in Canada. Although it has been well known that about 80% of all refugees are women and children, this fact does not officially affect the selection procedures in overseas Canadian missions. The new plan reflects therefore an admission that even with refugees who should qualify to immigrate to Canada on the basis of humanitarian reasons, priority was usually given to those who show greater likelihood of successful establishment in Canada. Traditionally, therefore, families without a male parental figure could not qualify as easily for admission to the country (A Broader Vision, 1994; Immigration Consultation Report, 1994; Into the 21st Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship, 1994). On June 1, 1994, however, the Minister issued The Declaration on Refugee Protection for Women by which the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada "recognizes the need to overcome traditional, male oriented views of the potential of refugees for 'successful establishment' in Canada" (A Broader Vision, 1994, p. 22). As a response to this initiative, the Women at Risk program was established to meet the special needs of disadvantaged women and ensure their protection. The program allows single mothers as well as those women who suffered severe mistreatment

during their war and refugee exile to be given advantages when applying for admission to Canada.

The distribution of refugees from different parts of the world is shown in the Figure 1. Unlike in the last decade, large numbers of refugees in recent years came from Africa and Asia.

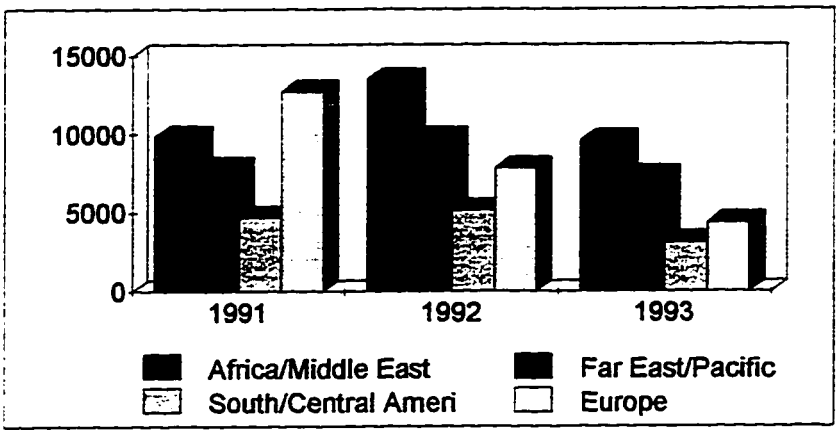

Figure 1. Percentage of refugees from different regions of the world between 1991 and 1993. Adapted from the Facts and Figures: Overview of Immigration, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994).

Ontario is by far the most frequent destination for refugees coming to Canada. As can be seen on Figure 2, Ontario alone received around 60,000 refugees from all over the world between the years 1991 and 1993.

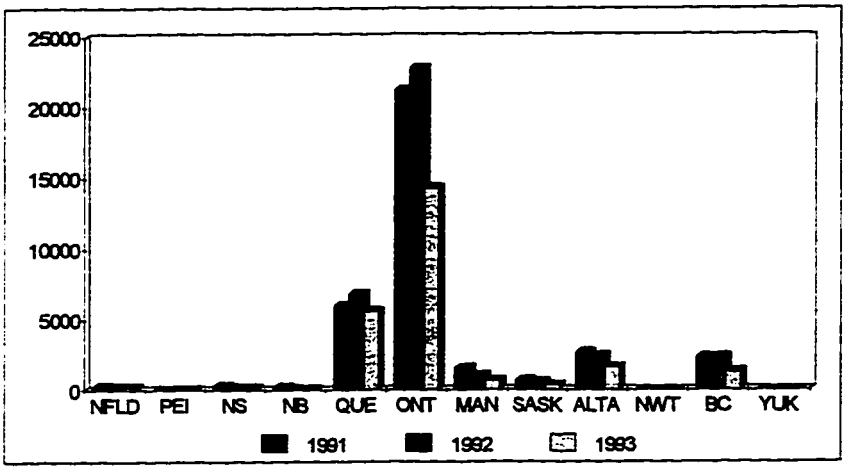

Figure 2. Refugees by Province. Numbers of newcoming refugees in Canadian provinces in 1991, 1992, and 1993. Adapted from the Facts and Figures: Overview of Immigration, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994).

The most recent statistics on the age distribution of refugees from 1993 (Figure 3) show that Canada received 5,848 refugee children between ages 0 and 14 and 4,995, between age 14-24. If transferred into percentages, these figures also show that almost 50% of the overall refugee population are children of school age.

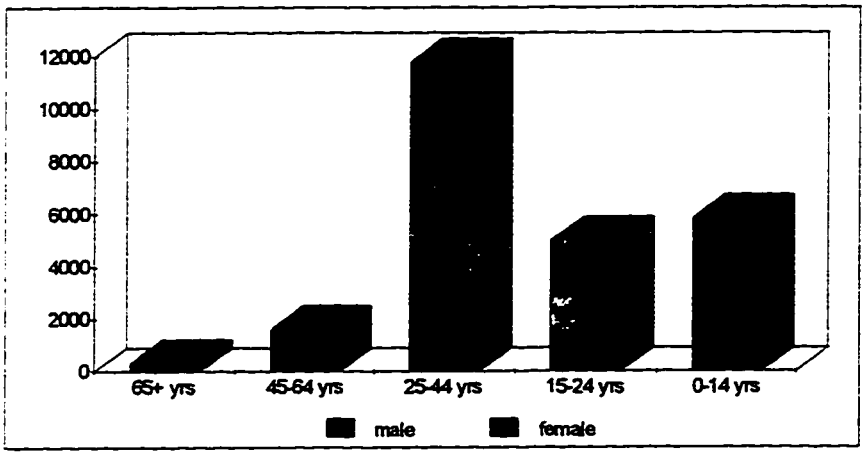

Figure 3. Refugees by Age and Gender in 1993. Adapted from: Facts and Figures: Overview of Immigration, issued by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994).

Understanding the Phenomenon of War Trauma

Most of the immigrant and refugee literature deals with the adaptation process, following settlement in a new country (Berry, 1988, 1991; Berry & Kim, 1988; Disman, 1982; Edwards, 1989; Williams & Westermeyer, 1986). Almost exclusively, this literature focuses on adult issues thereby implicitly assuming that adults are exposed the most to stresses of resettlement. In comparison, the literature on how this adaptation process applies to refugee and immigrant children is far less extensive and these issues have only recently started to gain more attention (Aronowitz, 1984; Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Masser, 1992; Sack, Aarke, Chaurithy, Dickson, Goff, Langam, & Kinzie, 1993; Williams & Rasanen, 1989). The most elaborated area in this literature is on the psychosocial adjustment of refugee children and the challenges of a cultural change (Aronowitz,1984; Hicks, Lalonde & Pepler, 1993; Prilleltensky, 1993; Rasanen, 1989).

The work of Berry (1988, 1991), provides valuable theoretical considerations of the settlement integration process, and distinctly stands out as a starting point for

conceptualization of the issue. Equally important are insights on stress provoking and stress-buffering factors raised in the works of Ajdukovic and Ajdukovic (1993), Garmezy (1985), Mowbray (1988), Pynoos and Eth (1986), Russean (1993), Williams (1991), and Zivcic (1993).

It is interesting to note that despite the obvious differences in immigration policies between the United States and Canada (Berry, 1988, 1991) in terms of how the settlement and integration process is viewed, one can hardly notice conceptual differences in the way children's issues are interpreted. Still, an assumption could be made that Canada, with its multiculturalism policy, is in favour of a more sensitive approach to ethno-cultural issues of its citizens and that this policy may be reflected more clearly in its intervention programs (Akotia, 1992; Kramer, 1991). The review and analysis of the refugee literature to be presented in this section reveals at least three polarized dimensions:

- *Clinical vs. multidisciplinary approach.* Although some of the researchers (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Allodi & Cowgil, 1992; Grizenko & Fisher, 1982; Zivcic, 1993) discuss child refugee issues within clearly defined paradigms of their science (mainly psychology or psychiatry), others emphasize the uniqueness of the phenomenon of war trauma with particular attention to its collective nature that often includes considerations from anthropology and sociology (Omer & Alon, 1994; Rousseau, 1993; Sasao & Sue, 1993).
- *Ethnically-centred vs. mainstream research and intervention.* Whereas some authors chose to explore the phenomena of refugeeism and war trauma in general (Berry, 1991, Lin, 1986; Pynoos & Eth, 1986; Williams, 1991), most focus on the ordeals of individual ethnic groups assuming that each is phenomenologically unique due to the cultural tradition deeply embodied in people's experiences (Beiser, Turner & Ganesan, 1989; Kinzie, 1981, 1985; Miller & Billings, 1994; Mowbray, 1988).

- *Ecological vs. individualistic view*. The individualistic perspective is still dominant in discussions on war trauma and refugeeism (Foy, 1992; Kinzie, 1985). It focuses mainly on examining individual psychopathology and searches for variations in traditional therapy to meet the needs of the survivors while categorizing their problems, according to well elaborated concepts such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. However, there have been more and more reports of attempts to explore new paradigms that take into consideration multiple perspectives to exploring the phenomenon, mainly around the ecological integration of factors contributing to its development and a quest for the development of culturally-anchored methodologies (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Rousseau, 1993; Sasao, & Sue, 1993; Vrij, Dragt, & Kopperlear, 1992).

The Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Perspective

The majority of literature related to the effects of war trauma considers Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to be the most suitable concept to describe a variety of psychological disturbance related symptoms in the refugee population. Typical clinical observations related to PTSD include regressive behaviour, aggression, psychophysiological disturbances, guilt, grief reactions, changes in school performance, personality changes and variety of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Allodi & Cowgil, 1982; Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993; Jensen & Shaw, 1993; Kinzie, 1981; Lin, 1986; Mowbray, 1988; Omer & Alon, 1994; Rousseau, 1993; Williams, 1986; Williams, 1991; Zivcic, 1993).

The concept of PTSD was first introduced in 1980 in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III) of the American Psychiatric Association. The term represented a remarkable advance in psychopathology diagnostics since it pointed at the direct link between a causal agent (trauma) and a consequent syndrome (Foy, 1992). The most recent version of the DSM IV (1994)

shown in Figure 4 both defines the phenomenon and outlines an exhaustive list of "primary" symptoms found in survivors.

A. The individual has experienced an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, e.g., serious threat to one's life or physical integrity; serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives or friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has been, is being (or has recently been) seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence.

B. The traumatic event is persistently reexperienced in at least one of the following ways:
1. recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event(in young children, repetitive play in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed) 2. recurrent distressing dreams of the event 3. sudden acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative (flashback) episodes, even those that occur upon waking or when intoxicated) 4. intense psychological distress at exposure to events that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event, including anniversaries of trauma.

C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma or numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by at least three of the following:

1. deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the trauma 2. deliberate efforts to avoid activities or situations that arouse recollections of the trauma 3. inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma (psychogenic amnesia) 4. markedly diminished interest in significant activities (in young children, loss of recently acquired developmental skills such as toilet training or language skills) 5. feeling of detachment or estrangement from others 6. restricted range of affect, e.g., unable to have loving feelings 7. sense of foreshortened future, e.g. child does not expect to have a career, marriage, children or a long life

D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma) as indicated by at least two of the following: 1. difficulty falling or staying asleep 2. irritability or outbursts of anger 3. difficulty concentrating 4. hypervigilance 5. exaggerated startle response 6. physiologic reactivity at exposure to events that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event (e.g., a woman who was raped in an elevator breaks out in a sweat when entering any elevator)

E. Duration of the disturbance of at least one month. Specify delayed onset if the onset of symptoms was at least six months after the trauma.

Figure 4. Diagnostic Criteria for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, DSM-IV, (1994).

Despite the thoroughness of the preceding list of symptoms, the list of events to meet requirements for a bona fide "traumatic stressor" has never been completed. Moreover, there is a great deal of current controversy about its distinctiveness relative to some other disorders (such as depression, anxiety disorder, and substance abuse). Another area of confusion stems from the ambiguity around critical incidents to provoke the syndrome as well as the impact of the intensity of exposure to traumatic events upon the development of the syndrome (Foe, 1992). The impact of war trauma on children measured in terms of the PTSD symptoms was identified in number of studies. Arryo and Eth (1985) found PTSD symptoms in one-third of the refugee children they examined, and Kinzie (1986) found the same in 50% of Cambodian refugee children.

However, some authors also identified that children's symptoms may differ significantly from those found in adults. Terr (1983) discovered several distinctive characteristics of PTSD symptoms in children. Most of the children:

- do not become amnestic and do not repress their memories or deny reality (especially children over four).
- do not exhibit psychic numbing.
- consciously choose to think about their trauma and often don't have flashbacks.
- show poorer school performance only for a few months after trauma.
- frequently use post-traumatic play and reenactment.
- experience a more obvious time skew, as well as dramatic foreshortening of their view of future than adults.

All of these problems may occur among some of the refugee children. However, borrowing this diagnostic term to generalize consequences of the war-related trauma seems to be an oversimplification.

The PTSD represented significant advancement for diagnostics when it first emerged. It still needs to be given credit for pointing at the contextual factors as being a

primary source of mental health problems. Later, however, it became evident that PTSD is neither sufficient nor appropriate for all forms of trauma, including ones related to war and refugeeism. Yet, for many practitioners it remains one of the major tools of problem identification by providing a frame of reference for both diagnostics and therapy. In order to avoid unnecessary generalizations, here, the PTSD only serves as a necessary guideline to understanding of some common difficulties seen in people's experiences. There are several additional reasons for not using PTSD as basis for the preferable theoretical framework:

- War occurs in a unique social context affecting a large number of people at the same time. There is a possibility that this fact may have a differential impact on shaping the coping mechanisms of families. This particularly applies to the understanding of the nature of the phenomena such as feelings of guilt, collective and ethnic trauma and identity, and understanding of political and historical implications of a particular war situation.
- War trauma can be understood in several frames of reference, each including a relatively broad spectrum of events and experiences, which may or may not fit with the concept of PTSD. For example, war trauma may be understood as a collective as well as an individual phenomenon; it may refer to single or multiple events, or chronic and long-term suffering (Omer & Alon, 1994).
- The experience of war trauma occurs in both direct and indirect ways. War experience can be very direct and include drastic suffering of individuals and families induced by war brutalities. On the other hand, some rather indirect but still very painful experiences, like that of separation of family members, refugeeism or isolation are traumatic but do not fulfill the previously outlined criteria of a traumatic event (Kinzie, 1986; Williams, 1991).

- Finally, for people who have experienced war, the ordeal often continues even after they reach safety. Often survivors leave war conditions only to encounter further trauma through an extremely low standard of living, generally unmet needs, language, and other barriers to access and participation in the new society (Aronowitz, 1988; Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Akotia, 1992; Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1988; Disman, 1988; Health Needs Assessment, 1992; Kramer, 1991; Ochberg, 1988; Prilleltensky, 1993).

Psycho-social Effects of War Trauma on Children and Families

All of the authors dealing with the issue of the impact of war trauma agree that it presents one of the most traumatic of human experiences (Foy, 1992; Pynoos & Eth, 1986; Williams, 1991). Traumatic stressors, including war trauma, are often defined as events that are life threatening, horrifying, overwhelming, and outside of the range of normal life experiences, often including feelings of helplessness, danger and anxiety (Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Pynoos & Eth, 1986).

This type of traumatic experience plays a significant role in the potential for successful "working through." All children who have lived in a war zone have been exposed to stressful and traumatic experiences. In addition, some of the children have witnessed the severe persecution of their relatives, neighbours, persistent death and destruction, were tortured or forced to witness torture. The most devastating experiences of course lead to severe and prolonged psycho-social problems (Allodi & Cowgill, 1982). Malmquist (1986), for example, found that all children who witnessed homicide exhibited severe psychological disturbances and therefore had the hardest time adjusting to a new environment.

Jansen and Shaw (1993) argue that low to moderate exposure to war stresses may have a more significant impact in the domain of children's values, attitudes and perceptions than expressions of psychopathology. In order to support this stance they

cited several studies done with children in Israel. All of them, for example, found the evidence of increased covert aggressive attitudes and increased patriotism among children who experienced war trauma. Interestingly, these children valued peace as much as their peers without experience of war. Also, war exposed children demonstrated stronger identification with the community and very highly valued courage in their peers. It was also found that war stressors did not produce hostile wishes and thoughts toward the perceived aggressors which confirmed that the phenomenon of identification with the aggressor is very infrequent among children exposed to war.

In her documentation of the ordeal and persecution of South African children, Hickson (1992) sees several important consequences of exposure to extreme violence. First, societal chaos produces feelings of meaninglessness and futility, a sense of confusion and, accordingly, the experience of alienation. "Normlessness," that is, adoption of inverted norms, can easily become a coping mechanism in those situations. It is not uncommon in regions of chronic violence for youngsters to develop the value that violence is the ruling norm and the ultimate means of goal accomplishment. Hickson concludes that the major psychological effects of violence are reflected in depression and anxiety. Other effects include a sense of impotence, pointlessness, and emptiness; loss of self-esteem and feelings of humiliation; psychic numbing, emotional blunting, and the inability to express affect; and feelings of isolation and alienation. Concrete PTSD symptoms may also include distressing recollections, dreams, illusions and flashbacks; and persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma or numbing of general responsiveness as indicated by efforts to avoid feelings, activities, or situations associated with the trauma (Hickson, 1992; Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993). Symptoms of increased arousal are indicated by sleep disturbance, irritability, anger, poor concentration, hypervigilance or exaggerated startle response (Hicks et al., 1993).

In order to determine their present psychosocial functioning, Masser (1992) interviewed 31 Central American refugee children between the age of 4 and 18. Masser examined what factors in the children's history were the most significant and what symptoms they manifested. The variables used as the focus of the analysis were whether they (a) witnessed war violence in their country of origin, (b) had a significant separation from their primary caregivers, and (c) had other significant problems such as physical abuse, familial pathology or familial alcoholism. Masser found that many variables influenced the psycho-social functioning of children who had a high incidence of stressors in their lives. Only four of the children had not experienced any of the stressors, whereas 15 reported one stressor, 10 reported two and two reported all three of the stressors.

Sack et al. (1993), however, found a significant decrease in the presence of some of the psychosocial difficulties among children after several years. A six-year follow-up study documented a decrease in many of the PTSD symptoms in Cambodian children. In addition to that, the depression profile was almost completely gone in the follow-up study.

Omer and Alon (1994) argue that in any intervention with people exposed to disaster and trauma, we should be aware of individual, family, organizational and community resources. Several studies document the complexity of factors contributing to the psychosocial functioning of the refugee families. It is interesting to note that two studies discussed below (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Zivcic, 1993) examine the psychosocial status of children in the countries where they lived in shelters, prior to being settled in their new homes. It is obvious in both studies that not only individual factors but a range of contextual factors contributed to the well-being of refugee children.

In their study of prevention planning for displaced refugee children, Ajdukovic and Ajdukovic (1993) document some of the indicators of the psychosocial adaptation of displaced refugee children in Croatia. They found that being accommodated in a collective

shelter places a greater risk for development of mental health problems in the children than when families are placed in individual shelters with host families. The researchers found several factors that contribute to children's mental health problems: (a) loss of important others, (b) loss of physical capacity due to wounds, (c) loss of parental support and protection which results in nail biting, ticks, enuresis and fears, (d) loss of home as symbol of security, shelter and identity, for both adults and more so for children, (e) living with distressed adults who themselves continue experiencing extreme stress, (f) family separation, which produces both emotional pain but also causes a changed family structure which often placed greater demands on the mother, or the reversal of roles with teenagers taking over adult responsibilities, (g) loss of educational opportunities, and (h) poor physical environment.

Zivcic (1993) examined the emotional reactions of children exposed to war stress in Croatia. Four hundred and eighty children completed the Croatian version of the Child Depression Inventory and the Mood Scale (Zivcic, 1993). Both groups, refugees and local children (who had not experienced war), showed more depressive symptoms compared with a same age group before the war. Displaced children had more negative emotions like sadness and fear then their peers. Worsening of the overall mood for local children is also an interesting factor suggesting that refugee peers and the overall atmosphere of war has a negative impact even on those who were not exposed to war directly.

Mowbray (1988) sees the necessity for some form of intervention with children and their families who experienced trauma even when there are no apparent signs of PTSD. This is for at least two reasons: First, Mowbray in working with Holocaust survivors discovered that even the second generation can be affected by traumatic experiences. Although these children had suffered no victimization themselves, they were still disturbed because of their parents' experience and difficulties in parenting. Second, it was significant that to some extent disturbances were also identified in children who

associated with child survivors although they were not victimized themselves. Mowbray therefore concluded that intervention on multiple levels, with families, school, and other significant aspects of their environment should be considered as a priority when encountering the issues of war trauma among children.

Stress-buffering and Stress-promoting Factors of the Family Situation

Most authors concerned with refugee mental health agree that the likelihood of children developing psycho-social problems depends on a range of factors. This conclusion has been supported by studies of "risk and protective factors" with respect to immigrant children's mental health (Garmezy, 1985; Grizenko & Fisher, 1992; Prilleltensky, 1993). Grizenko and Fisher (1992) define risk factors as an "element which, if present, increases the likelihood of developing emotional or behavioural disorders in children compared to a randomly selected sample of a normal population" (p. 711). Consequently, protective factors are described by authors as those that buffer individual's or group's responses to environmental threats that may produce a maladaptive outcome (Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1987).

Unfortunately, very little attention in the refugee literature is given to the possible ways of nurturing the protective factors contributing to the successful coping with the trauma. Instead, as Williams and Westermeyer (1986) point out, the literature focuses almost entirely on how to shape mental health service provision to meet the needs of the pathologized population. Family and the resettlement surroundings, for example, may contribute both positively and negatively to the successful coping. Garbarino (1992) stated that children can cope well with war-related stressors if accompanied by families who provide a sense of stability and competence. The presence of strong social and community support may buffer the effects of adverse experiences on children and adolescents as well. Jansen and Shaw (1993) also add that adequate leadership,

community cohesion, and good communication with support agencies can also play an important role during and after the stressful events.

As Ajdukovic and Ajdukovic (1993) point out, the family, as one of the most important mechanisms of protection, is vulnerable to the refugee experience and may help ameliorate children's stresses or make them worse. The authors found that stress-related symptomatology was more prevalent in children whose mothers reported poor ability to cope with the stressful events themselves. However, this was directly related to the overall quality of living situation, primarily, whether the family had appropriate shelter, adequate nutrition, etc. They also point to the cumulative effects of a number of risk factors contributing to the potential for psychopathology in the future. A number of authors (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Beiser et al., 1989; Elbedour et al, 1993; Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993; Jensen & Shaw, 1993; Williams, 1991; Zivcic, 1993) point out that even if a parent stays with the child during and after the trauma, several barriers may prevent them from providing support. These barriers include: (a) their own experiences, (b) fear, (c) loss of status and control over the situation, (d) changes in roles, (e) previous problems in family functioning, (f) the type of migration experience, and (g) the social and economic status prior to and after becoming refugees.

Kinzie (1986) reported from his work with Cambodian refugee families that there was a significant association between PTSD diagnosis and a family profile. Thirteen out of 14 children who did not live with a family member were diagnosed with PTSD, whereas only 14 out of 26 children who lived with at least one member (parents or siblings) received the same diagnosis.

An interesting phenomenon became apparent in recent studies of family role. Researchers of child trauma observed that parents tend to underreport children's mental health problems (Ter, 1983). Two independent studies that examined effects of war trauma on Indochinese children confirmed this phenomenon of minimizing children's

symptoms (Kinzie, Sack, Angel, Manson & Roth, 1986; Krupinski & Burrows, 1986). The authors of both studies primarily attribute it to the parents' desire to obliterate the past. Though there may be culturally related methodological problems in the preceding studies, it is evident that several sources suggest the same tendency. As Peterson et al. (1991) and Zivcic (1991) noted, it is still not clear why this tendency exists, and whether it is culturally related, a form of denial, or simply the way the parents respond to psychological problems in general.

In addition to family, other forms of support may be significant in alleviating stress in refugee children. Schools can be one of the major supports, with teachers being alert, responsive and emphatic to the child's unique situation (Elbedour et al, 1993). Both the child's ethnic group and the community at large may also provide emotional attachment and a sense of continuity and care. Finally, respect for cultural values and nurturing opportunities to express oneself in unique way may represent an additional stress-relieving factor (Williams, 1991).

Successful Integration and Quality of Life in Resettlement Countries

The phenomenon of war trauma is inseparably linked with other issues, primarily settlement related issues, at least for first generation immigrants. Language and cultural barriers, lack of communication, miscommunication or oversimplification of the issue by the hosting community may contribute to the lack of awareness of existing problems. Although most authors agree that ethnically sensitive and culturally appropriate intervention is needed if one wants to learn about dealing with these issues, it is evident that not much has been done on overcoming these barriers (Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1988, 1991; Disman 1988; Edwards, 1989; Kramer, 1991; Williams & Westermeyer, 1991).

Literature focusing on the social and emotional adjustment of immigrant children is scarce compared to literature that talks about adults (Aronowitz, 1984). In the past,

those studies were predominantly focused on whether the prevalence of emotional and social problems among refugee children was higher or lower than among the native population. Aronowitz, for example, cites two studies that reported as high as 41% of recent immigrant children having "social or emotional adjustment problems" (Aronowitz, 1984). However, most of the authors agree that there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that psychological and social disorders are more prevalent among new immigrant children (Aronowitz, 1984; Williams & Westermeyer, 1986). There is, however, evidence that some of the behavioural disorders may be present among immigrant children in the early stages of adjustment to the new environment and that the disorders primarily occur in school settings (Rutter et al., 1974).

The Ontario Child Health Study conducted by Munroe-Blum et al. confirms that immigrant children are not at increased risk of experiencing mental health problems. (Munroe-Blum, Boyle, Offord & Kates, 1989). However, this study recognizes the fact that immigrant children experience social hardship through a number of disadvantages, especially poverty, in comparison to Canadian-born children. Since the presence of social disadvantage has proven positive relationship with mental health problems, these results appear to be somewhat surprising. Several suggestions may offer explanation for such results. First, the study did not differentiate between refugee and immigrant population. Second, as many other studies on immigrant population (Akotia, 1992; Alcalde, 1992; Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Beiser et al., 1988; Kramer, 1991), this study confirms that immigrants utilize mental health services significantly less than the rest of the population. This finding suggests that mental health problems are either underreported or less present among immigrant families residing in Ontario. As authors point out, it is also possible that the study measured wrong concepts, or that measures were imprecise (Munroe-Blum et al., 1989). Finally, a hypothesis could be made that cultural barriers prevented successful communication with the immigrant families. Furthermore, the type of acculturation

experiences of the families and the stage of transition to a new culture could have contributed to the results as well.

Berry (1991) suggested that learning about the process of acculturation is crucial to understanding of the nature of the transition experienced by new immigrants and refugees. Acculturative stress is a term derived from anthropological studies and identifies this process as the contact between at least two autonomous cultural groups which requires change in one or both groups. The phenomenon may be seen at both the group and individual levels and is characterized by three stages: contact with the new culture, conflict with it and finally adaptation. Berry (1988) conceptualized the potential outcomes of the acculturation process by explaining the possible answers to two questions of crucial importance to persons going through the process. " Is my cultural identity of value and to be retained?" and "Are positive relations with the larger (dominant) society to be sought?" By answering yes or no to these two questions, four distinct options could be identified: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization.

Assimilation occurs when there is a perceived need for positive relations with the dominant society and no interest in preserving one's own cultural values. *Separation* exists when the answers to the two questions are opposite. *Marginalization* is presumed to be the worst scenario where both questions are answered no, and people therefore have no contact with either the traditional or the dominant culture. The most desirable outcome according to Berry is *integration*, where people value both maintenance of their cultural integrity and making an effort to become part of the larger societal framework. In this case there is some degree of "structural assimilation" but very little "cultural and behavioural assimilation" (Berry, 1986). Berry also examined Amerindian communities, and found that communities with high acculturative stress are those with the least cultural similarity to the dominant culture and therefore prone to choose the rejection mode. The

communities with the least stress are those which are more in favour of the integration mode (Berry, 1991).

Berry and Kim (1988) also examined five different groups: immigrants, refugees, native people, ethnic groups and sojourners with respect to the degree of voluntariness of their movement and length of contact with the mainstream culture. People who voluntarily got involved in the acculturation process experienced fewer health problems, whereas refugees and native peoples, who involuntarily got involved in acculturation, had more difficulties.

Resettlement and integration of refugee families is recognized by many authors as a multifaceted process (Berry, 1988, 1991; Kramer, 1991; Prilleltensky, 1993; Stein, 1986; Wiliams & Westermeyer, 1986). The majority of the literature looks at refugee mental health, occupational adjustment, language, residence, culture and identity problems and measures of their progress and adjustment (Aronowitz, 1984; Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Berry, 1988, 1991). In addition, some studies focus on what has been actually accomplished in Canadian society to meet people's needs once they are settled (Akotia, 1992; Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1991; Edwards, 1989; Kramer, 1991). There are very few longitudinal studies that talk about the settling process of children who were previously affected by war trauma. However, several studies addressed some of the consequences that families and children dealt with after the Second World War. One study conducted in Sweden (Rasanen, 1989) was with children who were settled there after escaping war conditions in their native country, Finland. All of the children were brought on their own, without parents or other close relatives. The study looked at the success of these refugee children as adults focusing on their education and professional achievement. Of the original 568 refugee children, 35 years later, 379 people from the sample were compared to a control group consisting of 144 children who spent their entire wartime childhood with their parents. None of the control group children

experienced separation from their parents for longer than 2 months. Despite the obviously better living conditions provided in the foreign country, children who were refugees in Sweden unaccompanied by parents overall did less well than those who stayed with their parents. Changes in language and school systems as well as culture shock cumulatively contributed to lower school achievement. However, the overall results of the study lead to the conclusion that traumatic life changes in childhood did not affect physical and mental health negatively in adulthood.

It was stated previously that the settlement process and future life events could mediate whether risk factors will contribute to the occurrence of the developed problem. A number of studies conclude that the overall quality of life of new immigrants and refugees remains on the very basic level relative to the rest of the population. Although they are provided with shelter and living basics and supported by community programs funded to provide settlement services (Akotia, 1992), it was identified that many of these people are unable to fully participate in the society and use community resources (Akotia,1992; Beiser et al, 1988; Health Needs Assessment, 1992; Kramer, 1991). In addition to that, the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Committee Report (Kramer, 1991), identified this problem with emphasis on a very serious barrier to both access and appropriateness of mental health services when immigrant and refugee families need them.

It is important to note here that Berry's conceptualization of the integration process places unique responsibilities on society and communities to be responsive to their immigrating citizens' needs. To deal with issues like these is sometimes hard in countries that are culturally and politically removed from the original situation. The mainstream, new culture is often uninformed about the particular circumstances that led to the trauma, unless they are revealed by parents, which is often not the case (Rousseau, 1993; Williams, 1986). Danieli (1988) goes even further in being critical of a typical societal response to war victims. He talks about a "conspiracy of silence" in the United

States, as in the case of victimization of histories of Holocaust survivors and Vietnam war veterans. This attitude is reflected in societal negative reaction, indifference, avoidance or repression and denial of those experiences. He also found a profound sense of isolation and alienation among Holocaust survivors and their children to be the most common consequence of this attitude of American society. On the other hand societal readiness to respond to the issue also may vary. As Etzioni (1968) points out, the ability of society to respond in an optimal way to the changed needs of its citizens is crucial to successful integration of the societal values and reduction of alienation in the process of change.

The Report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees recognized the need for the society to step forward in assisting children's integration. The report states:

> Because the needs are so pressing, action to promote the emotional well being of children and youth cannot wait for the development of definitive knowledge. There are plausible reasons to suggest that changing community attitudes, attending to the curricula of schools and supporting youth-related programs will result in mental health benefit. (Beiser et al., 1988, p. 71)

An accurate measure of the Canadian response to the needs of its new immigrant population is hard to determine, but a hypothesis could be made that the number of programs providing support has been on the rise during the past decade. However, these programs are rarely evaluated and are mostly underreported in academia (Akotia, 1992). In communities throughout Canada these initiatives focus on the needs of adults through the provision of English classes, employment support programs, and other forms of support such as the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. In addition to these, community programs and organizations in some regions offer other supportive activities such as the befriending HOST program which matches Canadian volunteers with newcomers, Friendship Circles and other rather informal supportive activities.

Unfortunately, analogous systemic initiatives for school age children begin and usually end with the transitional school based English as a Second Language programs (Into the 21st Century, 1994). One of the rare examples found in academic literature and pertinent to the children and family issues is reported by Nann (1982) and talks about two school based prevention programs with Chinese, Indian, Italian and Greek immigrant families in Vancouver. The first one, called "Immigrant Resource Project," offered group support programs for newcomers. Bi-weekly meetings for mothers and children included both social and cultural activities, English instruction for both parents and children and social support services. The second program called the Multicultural Home/School Liaison Project involved cultural resource people who acted as liaison workers and performed a variety of direct and referral services to new immigrants, facilitating communication between school, immigrant families and the community.

Settlement Issues of the Immigrants and Refugees in the Kitchener-Waterloo Area

According to the latest census data, shown in Figure 5, the City of Kitchener is ranked fourth in terms of the number of new immigrants received per year. (Waterloo is a far less frequent destination for new immigrants). At the same time, the Kitchener-Waterloo (KW) area is ranked within the top 10 in terms of refugees received (Facts & Figures, 1994).

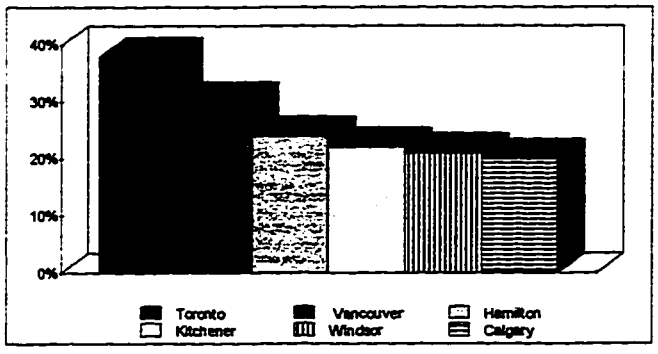

Figure 5. Immigrants as a percentage of census metropolitan areas, 1991. Adapted from the Census 1991, issued by Statistics Canada (1992).

Although the general trend of an increased number of refugees from Africa and Asia applies to the KW area, in the past few years, the cities have been receiving by far

the largest number of new immigrants and refugees from Europe. This is probably caused by the fact that according to the statistics of the local immigration centre, approximately 70% of recent refugee newcomers to this area come from the regions of the former Yugoslavia affected by the civil war (Figure 6).

Today, the KW community has a fairly established network of agencies and community groups that look after the needs of the refugee population. Cross-Cultural Services of the YMCA, and specifically, the local Settlement and Adaptation Program provide individual and group support and orientation. The HOST program looks after matching newcomers with host community families. Several other programs, including those operated from the local Multicultural Centre, assist people with their job search, language training and housing issues (Akotia, 1992; Social Planning Council of K-W, 1993).

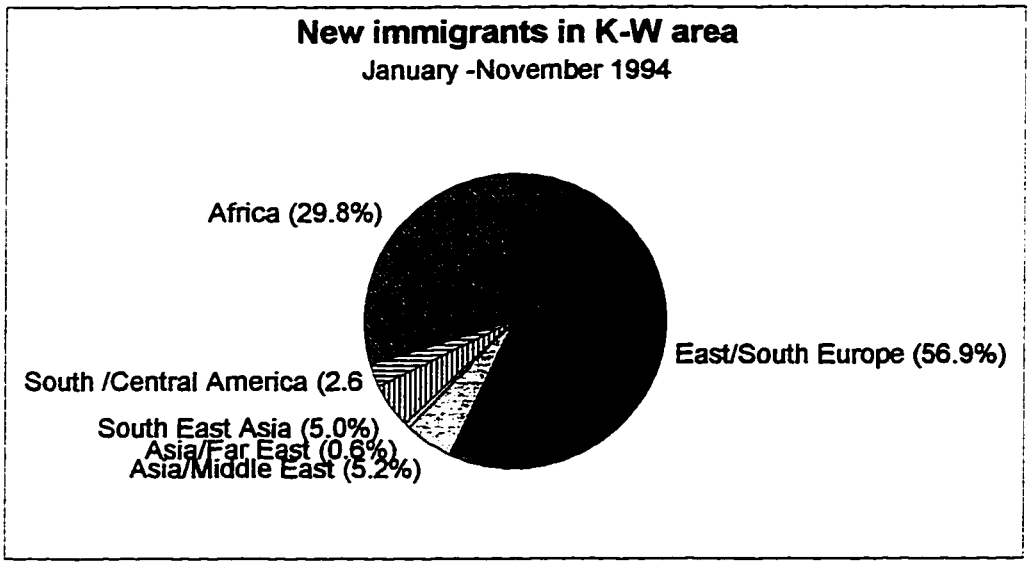

Figure 6. New Immigrants in the K-W area according to the region of the world. Numbers provided for the period between January and November of 1994, Settlement Directorate of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, (1994).

The stepping stone for the development of most of these programs was the "Report of the Immigrant and Refugee Advisory Committee of the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo," produced in early 1991. The report used action research

to examine the accessibility of mainstream community services and programs by newcomers. Some of the identified gaps and needs in service provision to the newcoming population were: need for cross-cultural sensitivity training for mainstream agencies, need for adequate interpretation service, improved staff and volunteer recruitment and appropriate outreach initiatives. The study also clearly demonstrated that child care, employment, health and housing sectors had not done enough over the years to allow for full access to diverse cultural groups (Kramer, 1991).

Soon after the release of this document, the local Multicultural Health Coalition started a health needs assessment project for three ethnic groups in the KW community. Again by use of action based research (Health Needs Assessment, 1992), the coalition identified and confronted some of the barriers to successful integration and access to health resources. The project looked at the specific health care needs and barriers to good health of the Polish, Vietnamese and Hispanic communities (at that time these were the largest newcomers communities in the area). Again, it was identified that immigrants and refugees in the K-W area face lack of work and financial stability, language barriers, cultural shock, poor housing, and lack of support from the community. All of these were reflected in an enormous amount of stress (over 40% of participants) reported that they had felt stressed all the time, most of the time or quite often). An action plan followed this project with the primary intention being to bring together key people in each ethnic community to raise interest and awareness about health and to start a process of health promotion. A year later the KW Multicultural Health Coalition was able to pursue the action by starting Phase 2 of the project. The follow-up project was started to involve ethnic representatives, in most cases foreign trained professionals, in the education process to gain skills to facilitate health promotion initiatives in their respective communities.

In response to the refugee children issues, the Equity Action School Coalition was recently formed addressing children's needs in the school setting. The Coalition formed by the local Public Board Officials and community agencies is currently involved in a project in one of the elementary schools with the major purpose of increasing immigrant and refugee parents' participation.

Community Psychology Point of View

An important starting point for a community psychologist doing needs and resource assessment of this kind would be how to approach war trauma when it is obvious that it could be conceptualized in a variety of ways. The present study will explore this phenomenon from a holistic perspective in a non-judgmental and non-stigmatizing way by taking into consideration the lives of families and children who experienced it. Several guidelines compatible with community psychology inform this thesis, especially the methodology and analysis of the experiences of the participants. The guidelines include:

- Recognition of the need to approach the phenomenon from multiple perspectives, including anthropological, sociology and psychology points of view, particularly with respect to ethnic, religious and cultural differences of people's experiences.
- Recognition of people's competencies in respecting the fact that the vast majority of refugee families and children have healthy coping mechanisms and may utilize their experiences in a learning process with dual benefits: to facilitate the healing process, and to discover avenues of empowerment in finding meaningful answers for their ordeal. Common to the intentions of this study and a community psychology perspective is also a conscious effort to move away from the individual symptomatology, labeling, and stigmatization and toward an account that includes the continuity of the phenomena.

- An emphasis on prevention and de-emphasis of the treatment mode, in proposing ways to allow families and children to deal with their experiences away from the clinical setting. This also includes encouragement of those who have barriers to access of mental health services to voice their needs and opinions and propose solutions to best suit them.
- An emphasis on ecological integration of the thought and experiences of the refugee families as reflected in consideration of individual, micro and macro-systemic factors. As Albee (1982) points out, any incidence of the psychological disorder is a combination of stress and organic factors mediated by a combination of coping skills, social support and self-esteem. In addition to that, Elias (1987) says that contextual factors, such as risk factors in the environment as well as socialization practices, social support resources and opportunities and connectedness should also be taken into consideration when developing an ecological framework. In discussing child abuse, Belsky (1980) describes ecological integration as a system that embodies the various etiologic factors influencing this phenomenon. He emphasizes the structural relationship among individual, familial, community and cultural factors (Belsky, 1980).

In order to be able to determine the dynamic interaction of all contributing factors to the phenomena of war trauma, Elbedour, Bensel and Bastien (1993) propose the following factors to be considered as a part of an ecological framework: the child's psycho-biological makeup; the disruption of the family unit; the breakdown of community; the ameliorating effects of culture; and the intensity, suddenness, and duration of war-like experiences.

The phenomenon of war trauma among children in this project is viewed in the light of individual experiences, micro and exosystemic factors contributing to its shape. In order to accomplish this, the following factors (Belsky, 1980; Beiser et al., 1988; Elbedour et al., 1993) will be considered:

- Ontogenic, and other individual factors affecting children's coping skills.
- Micro-systemic factors, primarily the family situation.
- Duration, intensity and the nature of trauma.
- Exosystemic factors of the community and their effects on the child's coping mechanisms. This primarily refers to the variety of resettlement factors including: community settings and units such as school, peers, ethnic community and community at large.

Finally, the community psychology point of view is especially reflected in proposing possible interventions. Three potential areas of development are anticipated as suggestions and outcome recommendations following this needs and resources assessment:

- Developing creative, culturally sensitive, ethnically appropriate and strengths-based interventions like self-help models, support groups, discussion groups, and creative gatherings as ways of addressing people's experiences (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Miller & Billings, 1994; Sasao & Sue, 1993; Short & Johnston, 1994; Vrij, Dragt, & Kopperlaar, 1992).
- Exploring alternative settings to traditional mental health agencies that would be supportive of these interventions: for example schools, neighborhood associations and ethno-cultural groups.
- Creating an atmosphere of overall community support and awareness, away from stigmatization and the "conspiracy of silence" of the community, and to allow for prevention by enabling a process of empowerment through encouraging people to share their experiences and educate others on the issues they have dealt with. To be able to tell a story, to be heard to and to convey a message to others, should constitute an important part of the healing and empowerment process. Alary et al. (1990) see this process of planning through participatory research as "community

care." Conceptually, this process is outlined as participatory action research, and is significantly removed from different forms of institutionalization. Its basic values are: a critique of the institutional solutions, recognition of a person's autonomy and confidence in their ability to assume it, recognition of our collective responsibility to combat inequality and its effects, recognition of various forms of self-help and solidarity and finally, valuation of change that allows people, groups and societies to adapt while evolving. Community care in this sense is relying on the concepts of empowerment and solidarity, collaboration and a stakeholder approach to problem solving.

Goals of the Study and Research Questions

The preceding literature review identified the complexity of the phenomenon of war trauma in immigrant and refugee children and their families, and identified the rationale for use of an ecological framework for understanding of its outcomes. It also provided a brief overview of the current and potential role of the KW community with respect to the refugee issues. The rationale for conducting this research project therefore stems from both theoretical and community perspectives.

Why community needs and resources? The answer is at least twofold. The most important is, the issue of new Canadian children affected by war trauma has not been explored in this form and in this community so far. Second, a number of service providers in this community have identified the need to address issues of children affected by war and refugee experience. In addition, some of the existing programs are already actively seeking avenues for optimizing their involvement. In that light, an action based research process appeared to be the most reasonable way of complementing initiated community activities as well as conceptualizing appropriate program and intervention planning.

The ultimate goal of this project is to provide the basis for and to facilitate development of strategies and programs that are based on actual life experiences of

families and their children in the KW community. This goal was accomplished by focusing on the two separate but related objectives.

a. To hear what is the lived experience of families and their children, and

b. To develop a community perspective on the issues of the refugee families and their children by obtaining input from the community stakeholders.

With respect to the first objective, the ambition of the present study was to hear what is the actual phenomenological outcome of both war and settlement experiences, since the two are perceived as inseparable in shaping the psycho-social profile of a refugee newcomers. This objective is theoretically grounded and conceptualized around the recognition of the events and processes portraying stress-promoting and buffering factors as they shape cultural integration. With this purpose, an effort was especially made to avoid attributing individual pathology labeling and categorization. Questions addressing this objective were developed on the basis of the interpretive theory concepts such as Berry's model of cultural integration and the notions of stress-promoting and stress-buffering factors as seen in ecological integration models (Beiser et al., 1988; Belsky, 1980; Elbedour et al., 1993). Settlement and integration issues were covered by collecting data on experiences of initial settlement, experiences of acculturative stress and present lives of refugee families. The ecological model helped in integrating past and present experiences and in pointing to the multifaceted nature of cultural integration with forces that both facilitate and prevent successful outcomes.

The second objective was to develop a community perspective with respect to the balance of needs and resources available to refugee families. In order to obtain such insights, relevant stakeholders in the community were contacted to provide their perspectives on the issue as well as to document the process of generating more specific action planning. Unique to this objective of the research project was the fact that a

community initiative addressing the issue of the war trauma in children had already started at the time when this research was initiated.

Following is the list of four research questions governing this project:

- *Description of experiences:* What are the actual experiences of families and their children with respect to war trauma? The answer to this question was provided by means of qualitative inquiry, from refugee families and their children who live in the KW area.
- *Issues in trauma and resettlement*: What are the issues of refugee families and their children and how do they affect their integration in this society? This question was answered by providing: (a) family perspective on the stress-promoting and stress-buffering factors surrounding settlement, and (b) the perspective on the same issue obtained from community stakeholders, in this case settlement counsellors and English as a Second Language teachers.
- *The presence of the phenomenon in the KW community*: What is the prevalence of new Canadian children in the KW area who experienced war trauma? This question was addressed for the purpose of providing a demographic, quantitative perspective to the phenomenon pertinent to the KW community.
- *Action planning*: What are the priority action steps with respect to refugee children issues as perceived by the existing working group in the KW community? The local community group served as a forum for identifying action steps on the basis of self-identified needs and resources.

METHODOLOGY

Needs and Resources Assessment: Intentions and Guiding Principles

There has been both an enormous interest and enthusiasm and at the same time reluctance among community groups, providers and participants regarding whether a needs assessment is a necessary tool for shaping community action. This reluctance

mostly stems from the fact that needs assessment projects often require considerable resources, are lengthy, and time consuming. In addition, since formal projects of this kind are lengthy, the momentum characterized by stakeholder's enthusiasm could be jeopardized, or even lost before any conclusions or recommendations are made. The local working group composed of interested agencies and individuals (Figure 7) discussed these concerns and came to a consensus that a community needs and resources assessment on the issue of war and refugee trauma among children and their families may be useful for several reasons:

- The community at large and service providers are not aware of the existence of the problem and so do not perceive a need for the action.
- It takes the guessing out of the planning process by documenting, updating, and assessing available resources and present needs.
- It may increase and justify efforts that have already started.

The intention of the present research is to examine both refugee and settlement factors in terms of their relative contributions to the outcomes of the refugee experience. Also, it will emphasize the importance of developing interventions to facilitate enrichment of the quality of life of children affected by war trauma, to allow for their expression of experiences in a safe and supportive way, through the support of an understanding community. Furthermore, it is an intention of this study to promote and enhance collaborative action among agencies and other stakeholders to allow children to present themselves as survivors not victims, by permitting them to participate in creation of avenues of healing. Most important, it is my hope that the study may help those children complete their childhood and adolescent tasks in spite of these terrible experiences.

Guiding Principles: Culturally Anchored Methodology and Action Oriented Research

In order to provide culturally sensitive and adequate documentation of the experiences of people, several guidelines of the culturally anchored methodology developed by Hughes, Seidman, and Williams (1993) are adopted in this research project. According to Hughes et al. it is most useful:

- to bring all stakeholders together to assist in formulating the problem, question, or identifying a phenomenon.
- to use caution when using single variables to describe or define a cultural group.
- it is always safer to define a population by a number of indicators.
- a "within" instead of "between" group study may be much more meaningful in research that involves other cultures. However this does not mean that underlying processes and outcomes should not be sought.
- it is good to choose, combine and develop new methods tailored both to the research question and cultural nuances of the population concerned.
- it is recommended for culturally anchored methodologies to work towards developing novel data analytic techniques to match the method and phenomena of interest.

Sasao and Sue (1993) suggest that a culturally anchored ecological framework should include at least two types of research questions pertinent to community needs and resources assessment. Those are questions of a descriptive and epidemiological nature aimed at exploring phenomena and the extent to which they prevail in the community.

The present research is "action-oriented" for several reasons. First, it was initiated in the community together with a spontaneous action of the care providers who sought ways of responding to the problem of refugee children affected by war trauma. As a consequence, the research design complement this action rather than justify it.

Furthermore, this research has intention of strengthening and mobilizing the community effort that already exists by contributing to the community's understanding of the issues on which it is working.

The following definition of action research, given by Kennis and McTaggart (in Rothe, 1993) outlines the rationale for choosing this form of inquiry:

> Action research is ... a forum of collective self-reflection inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices as well as their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Rothe, 1993, p. 23).

The Women's Research Centre outlines a similar philosophy (1992) by saying: "...we see research as part of an ongoing process for change. It is an aid to action and a tool for empowerment, not an end to itself" (p.12).

This research will, it is hoped, also provide an opportunity to test our common assumptions, values, beliefs, as well as provide an opportunity for community and group members to work collectively and strengthen each other. By doing this, the process itself could lead us toward building skills, competence and knowledge of the impact of war trauma on children. Second, this research project is equally aimed at raising awareness among caregivers about war related issues that are artificially removed from western world reality. In a community that sees thousands of new refugees and immigrants every year, these issues should be discussed and responded to prior to the onset of mental health or other problems. Primary prevention should be conceptualized by caregivers as a proactive way of dealing with the problem. Third, divergent ideas generated by different strata of the community and by different stakeholders will contribute to the overall comprehension of the phenomenon. Action research of this kind may introduce us to people who could become new members or supporters of the action (Research for Change, 1992).

Finally, the community activities (such as: Survivors of Torture Project, Working Group for New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma, Equity Action School Coalition) played an important role for this research project by allowing it to generate and analyze present efforts and circumstances, and set reasonable objectives and expectations for future actions.

Methods and Techniques

The needs and resources assessment was conducted by the use of predetermined techniques as well as by the use of techniques to suit emerging possibilities.

Qualitative Interviews

The main focus of the qualitative component of the research project was to hear about actual experiences of refugee families and their children who live in the KW area. This was accomplished through conducting interviews with three ethnic families (Kurdish, Somalian, Bosnian). The development of interview guidelines was based on standards for inquiry with respect to refugee experiences given by Kinzie (1981). He emphasizes that information gathered from people should consist of information on their refugee experience starting from the home country, through the escape process, refugee camp problems and difficulties, attitudes about being in the present country, and current worries and future outlook. Kinzie's suggestions also provided general guidelines to obtain information from children in this research project. Appendices A, B, and C contain the introductory statement, informed consent form and the interview guide.

Three families from the three ethnic groups were interviewed by the use of an interview guide approach with predetermined areas of inquiry. This approach was perceived by Patton (1990) as allowing more flexibility in the interview process, which is crucial for interviewing diverse cultural groups. However, areas of inquiry were operationalized by detailed questions to illustrate the points and provide clarification for interviewers. The interviews covered four major areas of interest:

- past experiences (war, refugees, initial settlement). This section covered parental and children's perspective on war and refugee experiences, making a decision to come to Canada, and initial settlement experiences.
- Present experiences of family and children. This section covered contributions on settlement and other experiences in Canada that have lasted to the present time.
- Parental perception of their children's as well as their own needs and coping strategies.
- Overview of the family's strengths and the community's perspective with respect to war impact on refugee children.

Key Informants

Key informants provided the starting point to gathering information on needs and resources in the community. As Rothe (1993) points out, for the success of a qualitative study it is crucial to have key informants sought out at the beginning of the research to ease entry and to provide basic and introductory information about the "social landscape." In the present project, this referred to utilizing the key informants for the purpose of identifying the current profile of community needs and resources pertinent to the war surviving children. Key informant group data were gathered through two sets of sources: (a) the local community group dealing with issue of children affected by war trauma, and (b) elementary and high school teachers of the English as a Second Language programs.

An existing community group shown diagramatically as Figure 7 served as a body providing the information on the priority action steps in the KW community. This information is presented by documenting the process and outcome of the use of modified nominal group method (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1986). A brief description of the technique and the process is given in the Appendix D. The major question posed to the group was:

> "Based on the skills and resources of this group, as well as the needs of refugee children as you perceive them, what concrete action steps do you see for this group?"

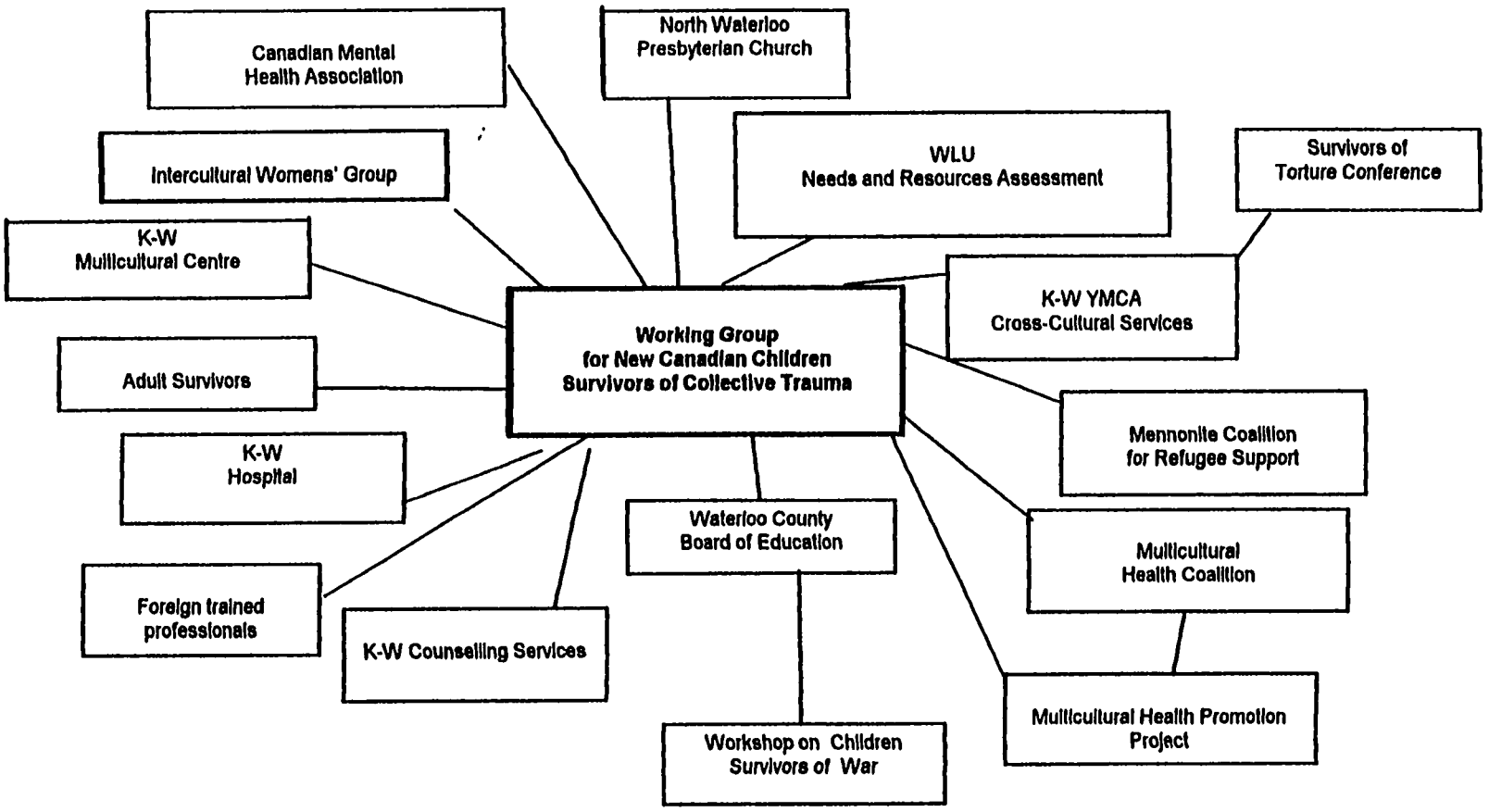

Figure 7. Schematic diagram of the participants and activities of the Working Group for New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma

The nominal group technique was facilitated at the second meeting of this community group as a means of articulating the needs and resources as well as the action plans for the group. At the initial meeting, community members had a chance to meet each other, hear about each others' experiences and share their concerns related to the well-being of refugee children as well as their motivation for joining the group.

The group has representation from agencies, as well as community and ethnic groups that deal with new immigrants in the KW area. It has representatives from child care facilities of the centres delivering English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, the local school board, KW Hospital, KW Counselling Services, adult survivors, foreign trained mental health professionals (who are refugees as well), the local Public Health Unit, and agencies and churches supporting refugees in the KW area. Altogether 13 group participants were present at the time of the data collection.

The initial input of these people was identified as valuable for two reasons: First, it connected them and facilitated co-ordination of their efforts at the very beginning stages of their group functioning. Second, this group experience was described by participants as a useful learning tool that had allowed them to broaden their individual perspectives on the issue.

The second source of information collected from key informants derived from the input of 21 high school and elementary school ESL teachers who participated in two focus group interviews. The questions used for these interviews are presented as Appendix E. These people provided insights from their work with refugee children, and identified the present gaps and needs they see for those students. Finally, they provided information on those interventions that both the school and the community at large may initiate to deal with refugee and settlement issues.

Cultural Assistants

Finally, key informant information was gathered from two "cultural assistants," who belong to the two different ethnic communities, and who played a crucial role in gathering the information from interviewed families and their children. Both cultural assistants were settlement counsellors and refugees themselves. Their observations of the content and context of the research, as well as their insights on issues affecting refugee families in this region, provided valuable support to the data collected from other sources.

Cultural assistants are in this study identified as people who provided cultural links to the ethnic communities with the purpose of obtaining culturally appropriate quality information and providing support to the interviewees. Cultural assistants were recruited from the group of settlement counsellors affiliated with local community based programs assisting new immigrant and refugee families in initial settlement. Settlement counsellors were chosen to play this role because:

- they belong to the same ethnic group as the one that is interviewed, which means that they likely posses sensitivity and understanding of both verbal and non-verbal communication patterns. Matching ethnocultural background of interviewer and interviewee is proved to be a crucial consideration for ensuring meaningful communication, according to Vrij, Dragt and Kopperlaar (1992).
- they have proven interviewing and listening skills, as that is one of the major requirements in their job descriptions.
- they are well informed about resources in the community.
- they have already established a rapport with the participants from their previous contacts.
- due to the nature of the program they work for, settlement counsellors provide types of supports that are complementary to the core community psychology values, such as

respect for diversity, commitment to participatory and empowering popular education models, recognition of people's strengths, and promotion of community development initiatives.

In addition, cultural assistants were expected to provide valuable insights on the current outlook of their respective ethnic communities and their perception of newcomers' needs. In that sense, the training session for cultural assistants was a two-way process in which they could provide information as key informants, and at the same time participate in planning and training for interviewing.

In short, cultural assistants had a role that was at least threefold: (a) they participated as key informants in developing and reshaping the interview format to suit the needs of the particular ethnic group, and subsequently they participated in the process of gathering culturally appropriate information; (b) they translated and interpreted interviews and provided feedback to interviewed families; and (c) they provided information on current developments in the community to the interviewed families.

Training session with cultural assistants. The several meetings I had with the two cultural assistants provided a good opportunity for interaction, support and clarification with respect to interviewing issues. The outline of the consultations and training session is provided in Appendix F. The cultural assistants also provided valuable insights with respect to particular issues affecting the settlement of the ethnic group they see in their day to day work. An issue was raised that the interview might strengthen the relationship that the cultural assistants already had with the families, since details on the trauma and review of their overall experience often remain unspoken. In all three cases, the families had a warm and positive relationship with interviewer, which was one of the major criteria for recruiting participants and reducing harm. Interviewed families therefore felt completely comfortable with the interviewer, although it was reported that taping, and consent forms had brought a note of formality that confused the interviewees somewhat.

It was explained to me later that although these procedures are aimed at protecting confidentiality and release of information, families resented them because it contradicted their perceptions of the interview situation. Regardless, all of the three chosen families agreed to participate, and completed the necessary formalities.

Social Indicators

The last approach to answering research questions consisted of collecting statistical data, that is social indicators to estimate the number of refugee children currently attending schools in the KW community. The statistical data were collected from the sources providing evidence on the numbers of new immigrants to the KW area. The purpose of gathering this information was to provide a descriptive, quantitative background to the issue. Also, these quantitative estimates are perceived as being potentially useful guidelines for program planning. The information was collected from two sources:

- *Immigration records* from the Settlement Directorate of the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. This source provided evidence of the number of immigrants and refugees destined to the KW area in 1994 and 1995, and the demographic characteristics of the refugee population in this period.
- The second source of statistical information were *records of the local public and separate boards of education*. This source provided evidence on the number of children enrolled in ESL classes in 1993, 1994 and 1995 according to gender, age and country of origin, length of time spent in the ESL setting, and schools attended in the KW area.

The Participants

Three families from different ethnic backgrounds participated in qualitative interviews conducted by cultural assistants and myself. Both cultural assistants, who are experienced settlement counsellors, and I had the same cultural background as the

interviewed families. To recruit the participants for these qualitative interviews I first had to recruit people who would work with me as cultural assistants, to conduct interviews in peoples' first language, and to provide cultural insights specific to the ethnic background. To document the scope and uniqueness of refugee experiences, I decided to hear the stories from families that belong to the three most recent refugee groups in Canada, and in the KW area as well- Somalian, Kurdish and Bosnian.

Due to my knowledge of the language, I interviewed a family from Bosnia. Direct contact as well as the actual interviewing of the other two ethnic families were acquired through the use of cultural assistants. Consultations with cultural assistants assured me that my presence could have been viewed as counterproductive with the two other ethnic families. The sensitivity of the information to be shared as well as the fact that interviews had to preferably be done in families' first language, were major reasons why we decided that I would not participate in those interviews.

Children as Participants

The interviewed families had seven children altogether. Children participated in the interviewing process in three ways. Those who felt comfortable sitting with their parents and participating did so. This applied to two young men, 19 and 13 years old, and a 9 year old girl. The information obtained this way was treated the same way as the rest of the information obtained from the family and is outlined in the "family" section of the results presentation. Other children decided to provide their responses on separate occasions. Both of the decisions were made with the consent of their parents (Appendix G). Younger children (in primary grades) were encouraged to draw a picture instead of talking to an interviewer. After the drawing was done, children provided the title and the description of the content of the picture. They were asked to provide a picture of something about their former country, or their journey to Canada. Three children participated this way. One of them, however, did not feel comfortable sharing his drawing

with the interviewer, because he did not like it. Instead, they talked about it and the child described the message he was trying to convey. In addition to that, one child only gave her insights into how she felt about living in Canada, and did not contribute further. Their pictures became stories, so in addition to the drawing, their insights are described in a narrative form. Throughout the process, cultural assistants observed children's level of comfort and watched for any signs of distress. None of this occurred, and in fact all children who participated this way felt quite comfortable talking about their drawings afterward. According to the cultural assistants and my own observations, drawing provided the mildest and most natural form of getting their expression of the experiences. Three of these drawings are presented as an integral part of the interview section of the results review and are linked to the information given by parents.

Interview times and venues were mutually agreed upon among interviewers and interviewees. In all three occasions, interviewers came back for further confirmation and clarification of some of the points in the conversations. On that occasion, interviewers made sure that the family was still comfortable with what they said and that there were no harmful consequences of disclosures that had been made previously.

All interviews were tape-recorded. However, interviewers switched off recorders if and when the participants requested so. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers reconfirmed research intentions, data analysis process, and emphasized that participants could withdraw from the interview at any time. Each family received and signed translated letters with the following contents: (a) letter of introduction stating research goals and intentions, confidentiality assurance, voluntary basis of participation, (b) informed consent for disclosing information, and (c) informed consent for children's disclosure of information. These are presented as, respectively, appendices A, B, and G.

Full transcripts of interviews were handed back to the cultural assistants for corrections, additions, and clarifications. All questions for the interviews were agreed

upon with cultural assistants in the training session and consultation session that served as an avenue of obtaining a cultural perspective on how to interview people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In order to follow relatively common goals and paths in interviewing, three interviewers, the cultural assistants who spoke Kurdish and Somali, and I who speak Serbo-Croatian, reviewed all of the questions that I had proposed. We then agreed on use of an interview guide format. A list of supporting questions was then incorporated into the interview guide to serve as a reminder and check list with respect to more specific issues and areas that needed to be covered.

The families were accessed exclusively on the basis of whether they had expressed interest in talking about the issue of war trauma in their ongoing contacts with the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. This method of recruitment was chosen to ensure that no harm would follow from initiating a discussion on painful or sensitive issues.

Interview participants were informed about areas of the interview inquiry and it was left to them to choose whether they would rather talk about their present or past experiences first. Interestingly, as we had envisioned before, all of the participants decided to share their story in the present-past-present format. In addition to this format, in-depth information was collected on events and parts of their stories where either participants or interviewer felt that additional information was needed. The three interviews lasted between two and three hours each. In addition to that, each cultural assistant spent time focusing on the information gathered from children, on average between half an hour to one hour.

Throughout the interview, participants were encouraged to reflect on the wider, social context of their experiences, community implications, and the family context. The interviews ended with the collection of demographic data, only enough to provide brief description of the participants interviewed. Since the emphasis of the qualitative

interviews was on in-depth knowledge of subjective experiences of refugee families, only those demographics relevant to their current status in Canada were collected, such as family size, age, ethnic origin, employment status.

Feedback to Interview Participants

Feedback to interview participants was provided on several occasions and in several ways. First, feedback was given by cultural assistants who explained in detail what had been accomplished in the community, to that point in time, in terms of addressing the needs of children affected by war. This form of feedback had the purpose of raising the overall level of understanding about existing resources. The underlying assumption was that the majority of immigrant and refugee families had no proper access to this information (Kramer, 1991; Health Needs Assessment, 1992).

The second was the informed feedback on the needs people had expressed during the process of the interview. Interviewees were provided with support and assistance of the same kind a settlement counsellor (in this case cultural assistant) usually provides. In this way, any of the expressed concerns could be dealt with immediately. This component of the feedback was particularly emphasized by the fact that a settlement counsellor took over the role of interviewer. Thanks to this factor, the family could see the purpose of the research as being oriented toward action, since it is likely that settlement counsellors are perceived as oriented toward providing advocacy on behalf of immigrant families and as constantly devoted towards assisting the problem solving process.

The third type of feedback was provided in the form of a summary of results with emphasis on the recommendations for change. This type of feedback was again provided with help from the cultural assistants. Cultural assistants brought written material to the families and translated them orally. On this occasion, families were again invited to participate in the local community group as well as to attend the Survivors of Torture and Trauma workshop "Our Clients, Our Neighbours, Ourselves" that was held on May 31,

1996. This type of feedback was also provided to the rest of the participants in this study- ESL teachers and members of the Working Group for Children Survivors of War Trauma.

Ethical Considerations

One of the major benefits of having cultural assistants do the interviewing was in preventing potential risks war trauma memories could provoke during the interview situation. Cultural assistants were expected to have the knowledge and ability to contact and propose the interview only to families who:

- were willing to talk about their experiences openly, and/or
- who perceived their present lives as being affected by refugeeism or war trauma.

The ethical dilemma for me was that potential risks of this method lay in the fact that the richness of people's experiences conflicted with the no-harm policy. If targeted families were already identified as being at risk, talking about their experiences might be extremely painful. This risk was dealt with by instructing assistants to observe participants' level of comfort during the interview and to encourage them to reveal only as much information as they felt comfortable. The potential for occurrence of painful memories and emotional reactions in interview situations (with families and children) could only be minimized but not completely avoided due to the nature of the topic. However, planned guidelines for questions were purposely designed to focus on behaviours and experiences rather than feelings. In addition to that, it could be argued that unlike some forms of trauma, war and refugee experiences are not as stigmatizing so it is very likely that interviewed families and children had opportunities to share those experiences before the actual interviewing situation. Finally, the list of supporting agencies, individuals and ethnic groups was available for interviewers to suggest to those participants who might need extra support.

Conducting interviews in another language also provoked another ethical dilemma for this research. Matching the cultural background and language of the cultural assistants and the people interviewed provided multiple advantages to gathering qualitative information, such as spontaneous cultural sensitivity, greater understanding of the non-verbal communication shared knowledge and experience, as well as increased understanding from the part of the interviewer. However, this approach has its disadvantages as well.

First, being from the same culture may impose opposite effects in a case where there is a difference in attitudes around political issues in the former country. In addition, the assistant may be in a position to unconsciously project his or her own attitudes, values and beliefs. In turn, an interviewee may feel reluctant to share certain information and therefore the whole process could be jeopardized. This risk was overcome by instructing the cultural assistants to choose participants with whom they already had a rapport and who had expressed trust in them such as asking repeatedly for their assistance with settlement issues. Also, the interview was deliberately shaped to a format that minimize opportunities for disagreement on the basis of political attitudes. Finally, allowing interviewees to fully and freely express themselves was one of the major requirements discussed during the consultations and training session with cultural assistants.

Another dilemma stemmed from the approach to interviewing ethnic families. To some extent, I was concerned that cultural assistants might not be fully grounded in the values and assumptions of the research methodology. The outcome of this potential risk would be failure in accomplishing some of the major objectives of the research including the empowerment component, encouragement of participation, and sharing information in the appropriate way. This risk was resolved by the way in which cultural assistants were selected. First, as previously stated, the candidates were familiar with the concepts of empowerment, participatory and action research, respect for diversity and community

development. Second, the cultural assistants were provided with a training session (Appendix F) that covered the major aspects of qualitative interviewing and the philosophy of the action research.

Finally, the fact that I did not conduct all of the qualitative interviews presented both risks and benefits for this part of the study. On one hand, it placed part of the process in the hands of others which left no control over it for me. But the benefits outweighed this risk. It was far more important and reassuring to know that full rapport, support and understanding was accomplished during the interview. Also, the ownership of this research project was not meant to be in my hands solely. It belongs to the community, those interested and action-oriented individuals who belong to the local working group and in the first place to those whose experiences give it meaning. Moreover, the choice of cultural assistants was complementary to the values of culturally anchored methodology, that calls for those alternatives to traditional techniques to allow for as much unbiased and uninterpreted information from diverse groups as possible.

Data Analysis

The cultural assistants translated the entire interviews word for word by listening to the recorded tapes and simultaneously recording the English translation onto another tape. After the interviews were translated into English, I transcribed them word for word. I felt that only by transcribing word for word could I counteract my concern that due to translation and transcription some quality information had already been lost. The transcripts were then searched for themes. After this phase was done, cultural assistants were consulted again with respect to coding dependability. Integrity of transcriptions was tested on several occasions, after the first transcription, after the coding and themes identification, and finally for confirmation of the entire story as provided by interview participants. In addition to refugee stories, I had complementary information and observations given by cultural assistants. These additions provided mainly background

insights, such as historical and political developments in the regions from which the refugees came. They also clarified unclear parts of the two interviews. The interview that I conducted in Serbo-Croatian was transcribed in a similar way. Themes identified from this interview were presented to the cultural assistants for the purpose of identification of commonalties and differences.

The primary focus of this part of the data collection was to obtain three distinct stories of the ordeals of refugee families. However, common themes emerged and allowed for inductive analysis. The cross-case analysis took place after the different themes were confirmed with the cultural assistants. The themes were then supported by opening files that consisted of citations from different families.

Out of the original 56 themes, I was able to derive the key topics in the way they are presented in the results sections. For the purpose of retaining the sense of continuity of the phenomenon of war trauma, I organized these topics in chronological order, close to the way they were presented by the participants.

Data collection and analysis was a long and extensive process that embodied intensive and continuous communication with participants and cultural assistants. The fact that both participants and cultural assistants were kept informed about the outcomes of the data analysis process assured me that my own insights and those of the cultural assistants did not dominate the original content and the context of the experience.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The data obtained from several sources are presented in this section in the following manner: First, the results showing the prevalence of the phenomenon of war trauma among the school age population in the KW region are presented for the purpose of providing descriptive and quantitative evidence of the phenomenon. In this section, emphasis is given to the demographic data showing the distribution of the school-age children in regional schools, their country of origin, age distribution and trends relevant to

the stay in ESL programs. Following this section, qualitative data are presented in a manner that reflects the notion of ecological integration, starting by pointing to the individual experiences, followed by the data reflecting familial and microsystemic factors and issues, and finishing with a community perspective.

The presentation of the qualitative data starts with three distinct refugee stories. The results and themes that evolved from the qualitative interviews with families and their children will accompany their stories. The themes are organized in a chronological order, respectively covering experiences of war, refugeeism, transition to a new country, initial settlement and finally, present life in Canada. The results and analysis of focus group discussions with ESL teachers are presented with an emphasis on confirmation of the issues identified by families as well as for the purpose of providing a broader context to the phenomenon and to introduce the settings of school and community at large. Both of the qualitative sections consist of an extensive number of quotations. Although being aware that such a choice considerably lengthens the paper, I decided to preserve most of the qualitative data obtained this way. By doing this, I feel that I stayed consistent in my striving to achieve and preserve the integrity of the present research endeavor by allowing the voices of the participants to speak for themselves.

Finally, the community perspective will be examined in the documentation of the process and outcome of the Nominal Group Technique that was implemented as a tool for identification and prioritization of the needs and resources in the KW community.

Refugee Children in the K-W Area: Demographic Data

Before presenting some of the relevant figures with respect to the number of refugee children in KW, it should be restated that Canadian immigration policy and practice have been consistent throughout the past decade. Immigration trends in Canada change only slightly from year to year. The total number of newly arrived people from all over the world does not differ significantly from year to year in either the immigration or

refugee categories (Facts and Figures, 1994). The only significant variation occurs with respect to the country of origin of the immigrants and refugees. The Immigration Plan for 1996 outlines the predicted number of immigrants to come to Canada in certain categories of immigration. Figure 8 provides a numerical breakdown of these predictions.

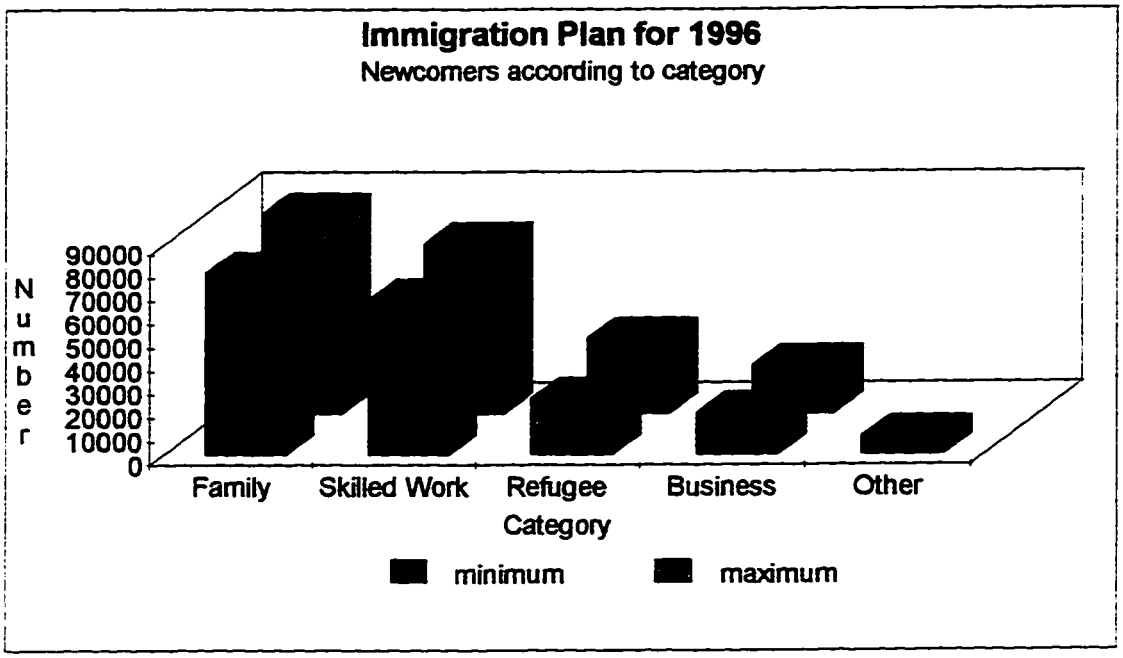

Figure 8. Predicted number of immigrants and refugees for the year 1996. Adapted from: Facts and Figures, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (1994).

During 1996, Canada' s priority is to bring between 66 and 73 thousand immigrants who are considered to be "skilled workers." In addition to that it is expected that between 18,000 and 20,500 people will establish businesses in Canada this year. The largest immigrant category (the predicted number is between 78,000 and 85,700 people) is the so called "family class" category. This category includes children, spouses, parents, and grandparents, who will be sponsored by their family members residing in Canada. This category of immigration, as I argued before, may include a significant number of refugees who are forced to wait for their family members to establish themselves in Canada before they could reunite. Finally, the total number of refugees predicted to come to Canada is between 24,000 and 32,300.

Statistical data from the regional Directorate of Settlement Services confirmed that in 1995, the Kitchener-Waterloo area received a total of 787 people with a refugee background (293, or slightly over 37% of whom are family members of immigrants and refugees who already live in this region). All geographic continents contributed to this number (Figure 9).

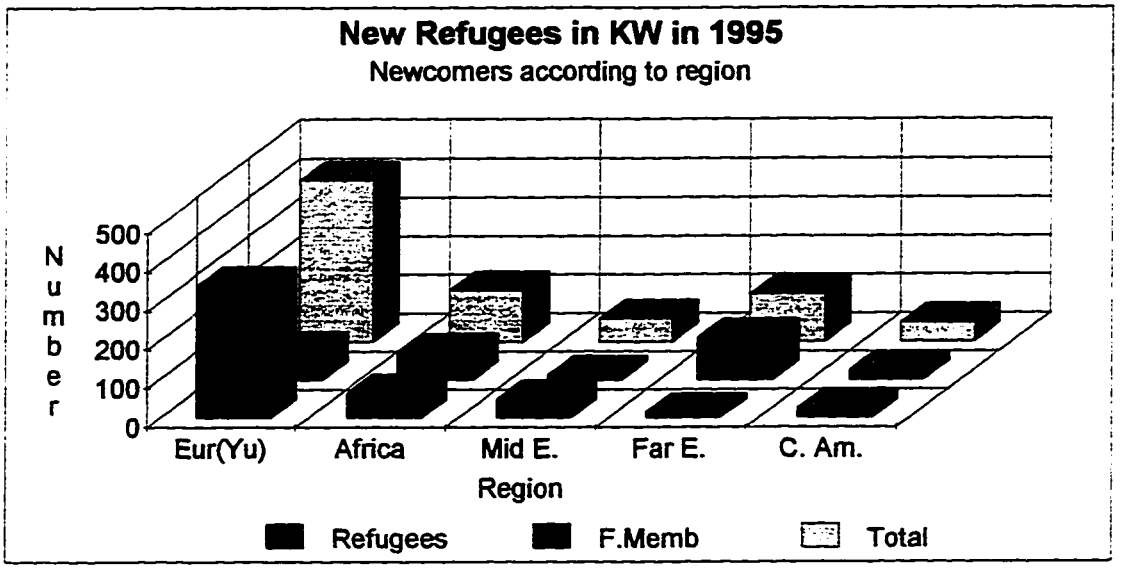

Figure 9. Newcomer refugees to KW area in 1995 according to "refugee producing" region. Adapted from: The statistical data of Canada Immigration Settlement Directorate (1995).

By far, the largest number of refugees (342) came from the regions of former Yugoslavia, that include present Yugoslavia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to that, some refugees who had come during the past few years from that region managed to sponsor their relatives, so an additional 76 people came during the last year in this category. From Africa, 134 refugees including 71 of the family members of those who already live here came from Guyana, Nigeria, Zaire, Ethiopia, Erithrea, Somalia, Sudan and Kenya. Some of these countries, such as Kenya are not affected by war but hold a significant number of refugees from surrounding countries. Middle Eastern refugees (total of 61 which includes family members sponsored by their relatives residing here) came from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey and most of them are of Kurdish origin. While the Far East

does not contribute any more with a significant number of refugees (only 15 that belong to different refugee categories), it is interesting to note how high the number of sponsored relatives are from these region. A total of 109 family members from this region were sponsored in 1995 by their relatives living in the KW area. Out of this number, 86 family members who are originally from Vietnam came to join their families. This number often includes children who are born in the refugee camps outside of Vietnam. The Central American region has also decreased in its contribution of refugees to the KW area. Total of 50 new refugees came in the last year, including 24 people who were sponsored by relatives. Countries of origin include El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Finally, it is important to note here, that according to the statistics of the local Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program, KW has increasingly become a destination for so called "secondary migration." This term refers to the migration of refugees who are initially destined to other cities and regions throughout Canada. During the last few years, especially in 1994, when KW registered the lowest unemployment rate in the province, a high number of refugees moved to the region. Unfortunately, neither the local, nor the regional immigration offices are able to provide accurate figures with respect to this phenomenon. However, according to the statistics of the local Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (the data include only those families and individuals who sought assistance), about three to four hundred refugees per year come to the region this way.

School-Age Refugee Children in the K-W Area

The prevalence of school-age refugee children could only be estimated according to the available statistical data with the two school boards in Waterloo county. In order to obtain as accurate as possible figures pertinent to the school age population, I recorded the total number of children registered in the English as a Second Language Programs with the Waterloo County Board of Education, as well as the overall number of new

registrations through the Welcoming Centre of the Separate School Board in the same area. This way of recording the data is based on the assumption that all of the students accessing the school system here, and refugees in particular would need to be registered with the language instruction program, since none of the known refugee groups comes from the regions of the world where English is an official language. These statistics were then adjusted according to the country of origin of registered students, in order to estimate the proportion of refugees. Only those countries of origin that are positively known to contribute with refugee population were chosen to develop this statistical estimate.

The statistical records of the Waterloo County Board of Education (Figure 10) show a steady growing trend in number of ESL student registrations with the public board between the years 1993 and 1995. In this period, the number of registrations of ESL students increased from 1359 to 2100.

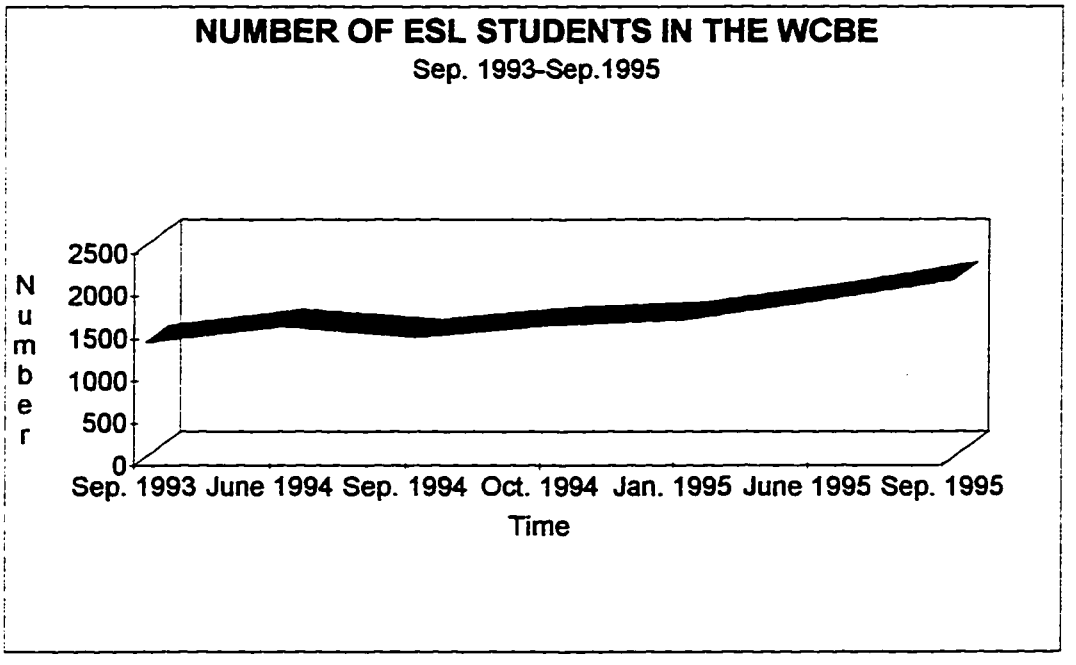

Figure 10. Number of new registered ESL Students in the Waterloo County Board of Education (WCBE) (September 1993-September 1995).

The total number of new students registered with the English as a Second Language Program includes students who were born in 80 different countries of the

world. It is interesting though to note that out of 2100 registered now, 733 identified Canada as country of origin. These are the numbers typical for the Waterloo region since Mennonites from Central America are resettling in Canada. Out of the remaining 1367 registered students, 820 or 59.9% are from the countries that either endured war circumstances or hosted refugee populations throughout the past 10 years.

Figure 11 shows the number of refugee students according to the region of the world from which they came. The highest number of students are from South-East Asia, 219 in total, which includes Korea, Laos, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Former Yugoslavia, the primary source of refugee population from Europe, contributed with 208 new students. Since the purpose of the present study is identification of number of refugees who experienced war, refugees from Poland and Romania have not been considered. Africa is a third contributor of refugee students, with a total of 180 students, mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Guyana. Several countries of Central America, such as Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala contributed with 135 students. Finally, 78 students are born in the Middle East region and have mainly a Kurdish or Palestinian background.

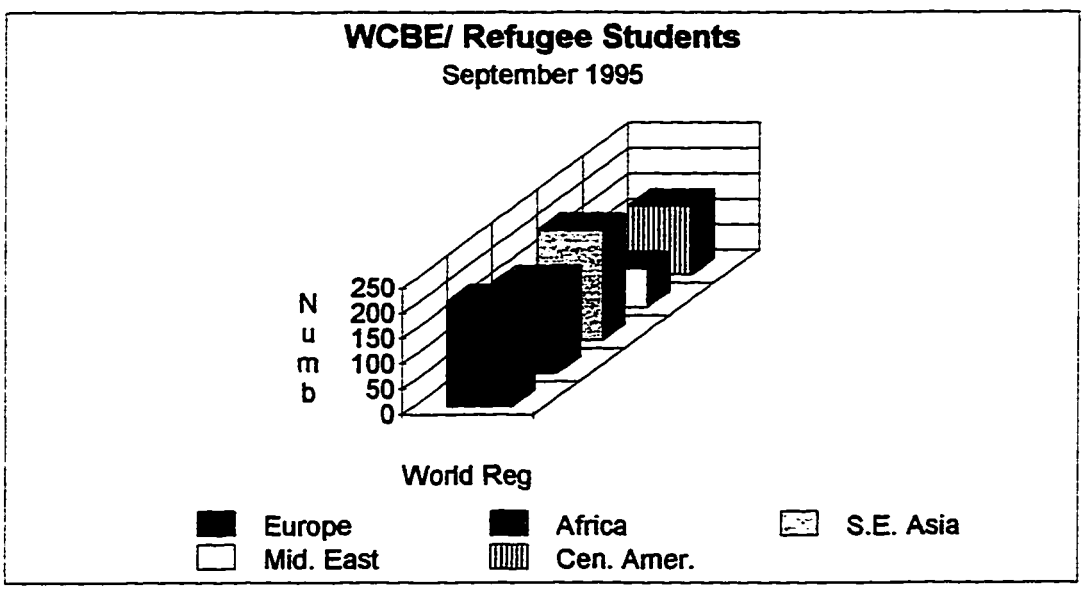

Figure 11. Number of newcoming ESL students according to the region of the world. WCBE, (September 1995).

The Separate School Board of the Waterloo region registered a total of 139 new immigrant and refugee students over the same three years. Figures 12 and 13 show the distribution of the number of new students according to the region and immigration category. Again, the number of refugee students is higher than of non-refugees. In 1993, the number of refugees comprised 65% out of the total number of new immigrants. In 1994 the percentage of refugee students dropped to 59%, but during the 1995 grew again to 73%. This latest growth is primarily due to the increased number of refugees from regions of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

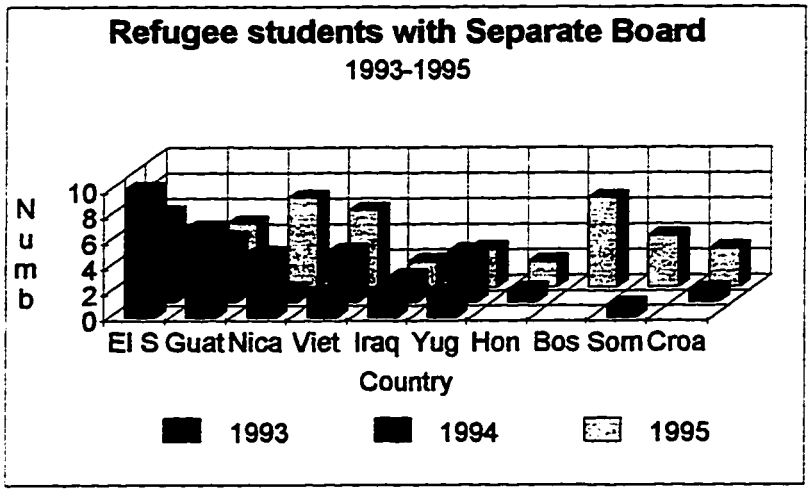

Figure 12. Refugee Students registered with the Separate School Board of the Waterloo Region (1993-1995).

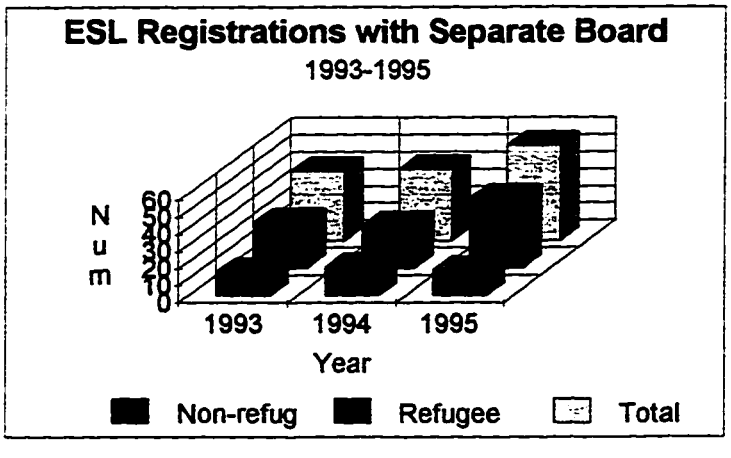

Figure 13. Distribution of new refugee and immigrant students with the Separate Board of Education of the Waterloo Region (1993-1995).

English as a Second Language Programs

The ESL students in the Public Board of the Waterloo are present in all of the age groups. However, it is evident that because of the parent's age (the largest number of newcomers who are selected to immigrate are between the age of 26 and 36) (Facts and Figures, 1994), most of the children fall into the range between 5 and 8 years of age. Figure 14 shows the distribution of students attending ESL programs according to age.

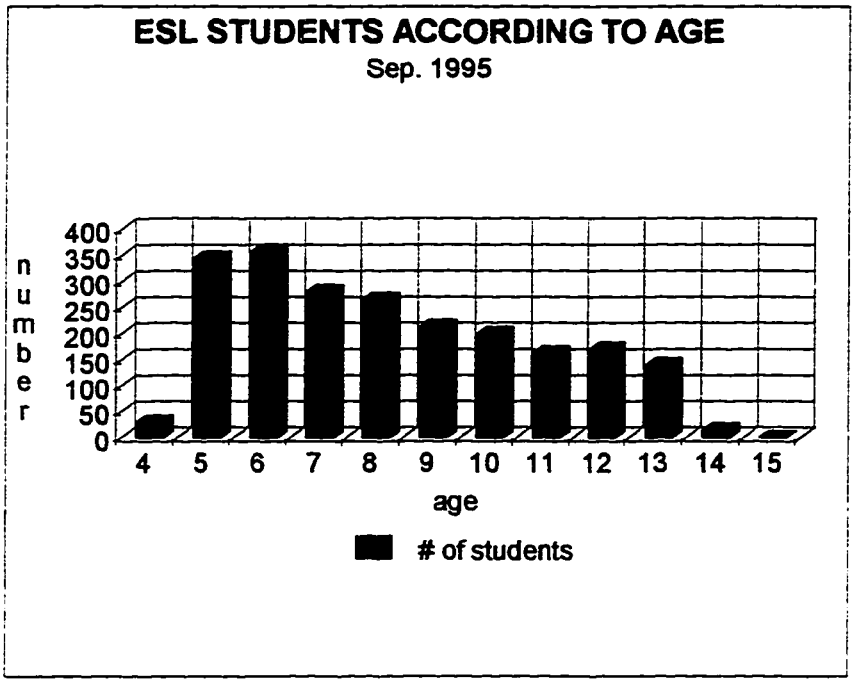

Figure 14. Waterloo County Board of Education; ESL students registered in 1995, according to age.

Most of the newcoming students stay with this transitional program for up to one year. Figure 15 outlines the average length of time students spend with the ESL programs with the Waterloo County Board of Education (WCBE).

According to the teachers, however, a certain number of students stay with the ESL program considerably longer. The latest statistics provided by the WCBE (December 1995) show that, out of the total number of students born outside of Canada, 202 or 23% spent over three years in the ESL program. This seems to be a significantly extended period of time for language acquisition for the school age population. The ESL teachers

in comparison, suggest that even with adult learners, who tend to spend considerably longer time learning the language, two years of continuous instruction in English provide in most instances satisfactory proficiency in speaking, writing and reading.

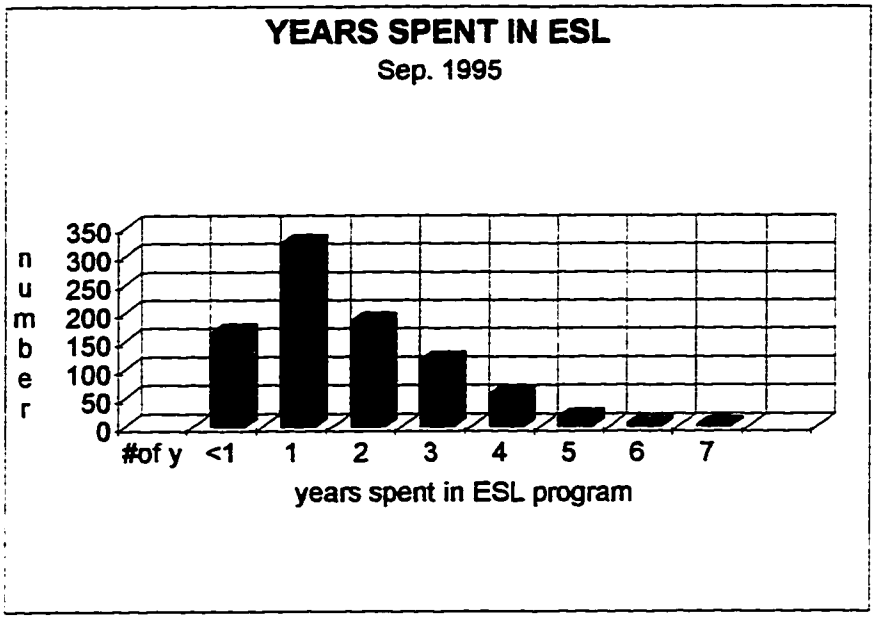

Figure 15. Number of years spent with the ESL program. Waterloo County Board of Education.

Before discussing these data further it needs to be clarified that the length of time spent in the ESL classroom does not necessarily reflect the time needed for acquisition of full proficiency in language. On contrary, according to Cummins (1986), students are on average expected to acquire full proficiency only after five to seven years of constant exposure and exercise in language. The term "full proficiency" in this context refers to reaching the age or grade norms in English vocabulary knowledge.

Figure 15, however, shows that majority of newcomer students receive ESL instruction only up to year and a half of being in Canada. Some students therefore need to spend more time in the ESL classroom before integrating into the mainstream programs. What are the factors that determine need for longer stay in the ESL classroom? Interviewed ESL teachers suggest a hypothesis that, for some of the refugee students, factors other than individual ones, may play a role in delaying integration into the

mainstream school curriculum. Among those factors, teachers mention previous school experiences, exposure (especially lengthy one) to trauma, including the war trauma and refugeeism, and finally settlement stressors. Considering these suggestions and for the purpose of identifying potentially relevant variables, we decided to look at the country of origin of those students who stayed in the ESL program for four years and over.

Figure 16, which shows country of origin of the students who spent over four years in the ESL, reveals that in fact 70.9%, or 62 out of 86 of them have a refugee background. Therefore, it seems that refugee status proves to be a risk factor for prolonged stay with the ESL program.

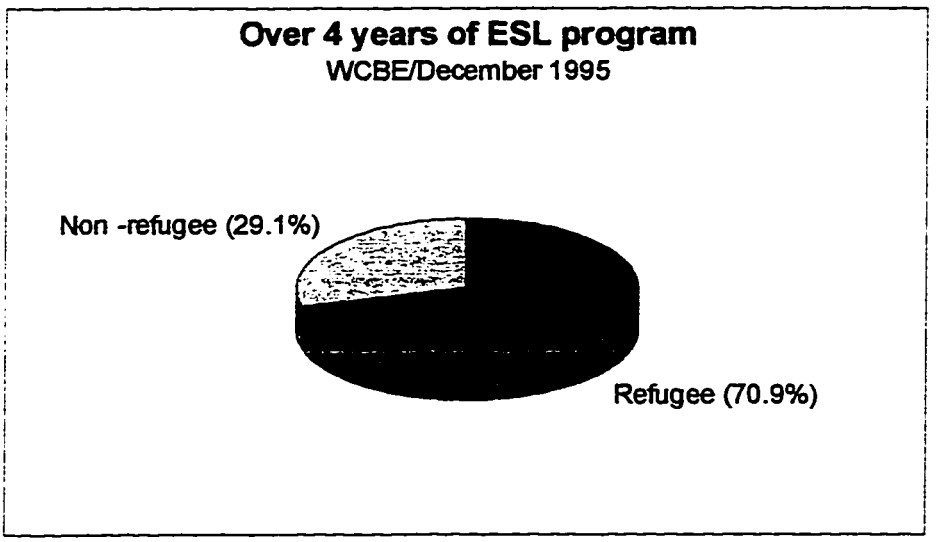

Figure 16. Distribution of refugee and non-refugee students who spent four and over years with the ESL program. Waterloo County Board of Education, December 1995.

Elementary Schools in the K-W Area

Appendix H displays all of the elementary schools of the Waterloo County Board of Education in Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge-kindergarten to grade 8 and the number of children registered in their ESL programs for 1993, 1994, and 1995. The list shows that most of the schools, especially in Kitchener and Cambridge have newcoming ESL students every year. Out of the total number of listed schools, 37% had over 20 children registered in these classes in 1995. Some of the schools, however, have been

experiencing a higher intake of newcoming students than others over the registered period (A.R. Kaufman, Linwood, Forest Hill, Crestview). With respect to this fact, it may be hypothesized that the overall student population in these schools must be predominantly of a recent immigrant or refugee background. Schools with the highest population of newcoming children are located in the areas which have a high density of immigrant and refugee population, a number of building complexes and subsidized housing units. This reflects that, in most instances, immigrant and refugee children live in relatively segregated environments, and therefore have much greater chances of interacting with other immigrant children than with the rest of the population. Schools with the highest population of immigrant and refugee children are: Forest Hill, AR Kaufman, J.F. Carmichael in Kitchener, Linwood and Crestview in Cambridge. Schools with less than 100 new students per year, but still over 50 include: Southridge, King Edward, Westmount, Wilson Avenue, and Cedarbrae. Among the first 20, only one is from Waterloo, which is mostly populated by non-refugee children who are accompanying foreign visiting university students.

Three Refugee Stories

The issue of how to most effectively present the refugee ordeals of interviewed families initially appeared hard to resolve, particularly since information was contributed from several sources - parents, their children and the cultural assistants. Choosing some of the excerpts to illustrate themes did not seem to be enough to provide an accurate and integrated picture. My subjective judgments were also standing in the way.

In order to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap while presenting a holistic picture of the refugee experience, I decided to retell the individual ordeals after integrating and summarizing information from different sources. The cultural assistants agreed to contribute their observations from the interview process. After the interviews were done, the cultural assistants provided valuable information to link the interview protocols with

the background and provide chronological order. Stories are therefore told by both the interview participants and the cultural assistants.

We also decided to use the sequential approach to story telling which proved to be helpful since it provided a solid opportunity to learn about critical incidents each family went through during their ordeal. For the reader as well, this approach may present a meaningful illustration of the entire refugee process from its beginning to the present day, as well as the interdependence of the components contributing to the current outcome for the participants. Writing a story from several sources provided a useful integration of people's experiences for me. The names of the places, countries and political figures are original and mentioned as they were told by participants. The names of the people are fictional, in accordance with the confidentiality agreement we had with our participants.

The Story of Sana

Sana lived in the quiet and peaceful rural area of Northern Bosnia. The 30 home village she lived in happened to be populated predominantly by one ethnic group. Sana and her few relatives were the only ones who belonged to another cultural background. Her husband supported the whole family by working for cake shops in different tourist areas of the former Yugoslavia. Sana was used to living most of the time on her own with her two children, Sani who was 16 at the time and Bina who was 5. Prior to the occurrence of tensions between ethnic groups, Sana recalls decades of peaceful living with both ethnic groups respecting each others' holidays and customs. While political turmoil initiated ethnic tensions elsewhere, her village stayed immune to those up until the neighbouring town became practically a front line where exchange of fire between the sides became an everyday practice. During the spring of 1992, she could hardly wait for the school year to end so her children could stay at home and under her supervision. The summer of that year was the beginning of a long period of isolation for her son, who since he was 16, could have easily become a target of other young people of a different ethnic origin, or worse, be drafted for the army or imprisoned. During almost two years of isolation at home, Sani recalled several incidents when their home became the target of some of his former school friends who quickly took up arms after the war had broken out. The longer he stayed inside, the more helpless he felt. His mother took over all of the responsibilities at home, and he looked after his younger sister. Getting enough food became a major problem as months of war passed. It became harder and harder as time passed. In addition, pressures from the other ethnic group became almost unbearable. Sana's brother was taken to prison. Verbal abuse started coming from the same people who had been her long time friends. During the whole ordeal, Sana noted, they were persecuted and intimidated by the same people with whom they used to share everything. Intimidation grew worse and came to the point that the intimidators would not hesitate to come in front of their home and express overt aggression. Then one night, Sani says, some of his former friends put an explosive in front of their doors and windows. The explosion was terrible. All three of them were in

the home. His little sister was in a state of shock for a long time after that. She did not want to speak and did not cry. She was just silent and did not respond to conversation. She did not speak for a month after the explosion. Sana and her son thought that they were lucky, and that it could have been worse, with explosives that could actually destroy the house with them inside it. Inspite of everything, Sana still did not feel she could leave; that was her home and she could not abandon it so abruptly. Going to a neighbouring town would not be such a good idea since her son could easily be drafted into the army, so she decided to endure and stay. Luckily, there were still some decent people left in the village who would not cross the border of ethnic craziness and who were helpful all the time. Unfortunately, there were just a few of them. Sana could hardly leave her home during the second year of war. If she did, it was for the purpose of getting some food that was already hard to find. One night one of the neighbours came to her door with a gun in his arms and demanded that she come out. Her son and daughter were sitting in the room, hiding. The man asked her to go around the house and under a threat to kill both of her children he raped her. She explains this event as yet another of her choices for saving her children.

Soon after this event, Sana finally started getting signals that it was going to be much better for her to leave, so she started selling everything she could. She decided to leave some of her possessions at a friends house. Most of it was sold for the minimal value. She was aware that she needed to pay around 800 dollars per person to be escorted across the river to the neighbouring town and then across the border toward Hungary. After five days of walking they finally reached the border. She recalls this as a great relief since it was well known that a lot of people disappeared during these movements. Living in the refugee camp in Hungary was hard, mostly because the nutrition and hygiene were so poor. Her daughter developed serious bronchitis that later turned into asthma. Her overall health was very unstable. Throughout the time Sana did not know her husband's whereabouts. When she realized that the Canadian government was offering a program for refugees and that as a single mom she could qualify even more easily she did not hesitate a minute.

After two and a half years of the ordeal Sana is here in Canada, living in an apartment with her two children. Two months ago she learned that her husband is alive and that he is heading to the same camp in Hungary. He will join them soon. Sana says her little girl is anxious to see him. Her son is quiet and homesick because he has no friends and there are so few opportunities for young people to go out and meet. Both he and his sister are doing well in school. Their teachers have only nice words for them, mother says proudly. Sani is in high school, and has a long way to go before finishing it-and he is already 19. Sana continues to be a good provider. She writes regularly to a friend in her village. In order not to get her friend in trouble, she puts a false name on an envelope-a name that is typical for the other ethnic group. There are no families of her origin in the village any more. But some friendly people still are. She knows that her house is now occupied by someone from the same village. Ironically, this is someone who already possesses another house in the village. She does not understand why at least some of the refugees from the other ethnic group were not invited to resettle in houses like hers. That would, she says, make more sense. She is grieving but "the life goes on", she says...

Sana had the following messages to the community with respect to the life of her family in Canada:

> Newcomers to Canada are very lonely. They need friends, and to learn more about how people (teenagers) of their age live here.
>
> Learning the language is long and hard work for adults. Youngsters have an advantage that needs to be utilized but not overused by their parents.
>
> The life struggles in a new country prevent newcomers from participation in the community and in the schools that their children attend.

Story of the Karimis

The Karimis lived in Iraq all of their lives. Being Kurdish in Iraq brought a lot of challenges throughout the past decades. Halim used to teach agricultural politics at a university, while his wife worked there for the human resources department. When Sadam Hussein gained power they were even promised that they would be given autonomy-something Kurdish people had been striving to attain for a long time. But settlement and negotiations repeatedly failed until in 1974 "revolution" broke out. Following the conflict, all of the Kurdish people decided to withdraw from the other cities to the region of Kurdistan and set up their own government. Halim, who was teaching at the university at the time with his wife, decided to join the rest of the civilians and ended up in Kurdistan where he continued his work at the newly established university facility. Marla, his wife remembers clearly an attack on the university in Kurdistan that happened soon after it was proclaimed independent. Many students were killed then and she witnessed the whole massacre, miraculously escaping the same fate. The situation stabilized for a few years, even some negotiations took place, but promises for settlement have never come true. When the new hostilities in the region started to occur, Marla was anticipating the worst. Halim was called regularly to serve in the Iraqi army which he finally found intolerable. Now they had two daughters, Aja and Jana, who were 6 and 3 at the time. They were both growing upset seeing their parents so anxious and worried. Halim's position at the university exposed him directly to potential dangers and repercussions. They finally decided to leave.

Their first destination was Iran. At that time war between Iraq and Iran was still going on, and Iran was less preoccupied with the Kurdish issue and rather sympathetic to those Kurds who were trying to escape from Iraq. On their way to Iran, Karimis together with other refugees got attacked by Iraqi airplanes. Although they stayed unharmed it was terrifying to be in that position. After the attack, Marla suffered severe trauma that produced long-term mental health problems. The older daughter, after being in a state of shock, started having frequent convulsions, that could not be controlled. Halim was desperate to have them both in the hospital but that only happened after they crossed the Iranian border. Their daughter stayed hospitalized there for several weeks. Both of the girls were constantly crying and displayed severe symptoms of post-traumatic disorder. Halim's wife was not well either. He was the only one who was still able to fight the odds of being persecuted again. Another attack came when they were already stationed in the refugee camp in Iran. Iraqi airplanes attacked.

A lot of people died. Marla and her children suffered yet another shock, but luckily all survived without injuries.

Karimis came to Canada with high hopes. The fact that they would have peace and stability here soothed them for a while. But soon, they realized that reality here was not that bright. It was hard to find a job, so both Halim and Marla looked for anything, just so that they were not dependent on the social system. They both managed to find menial jobs and presently live convinced that this country will never learn how much they can really contribute to the society with all the education and experience that they received in their home country. The children are doing well. They have occasional nightmares, tend to get worried, but overall, they are "normal" children their father says. The parents took an active role in teaching staff and students in their school about the customs, political and historical background of Kurdish issue. As many other Kurdish families, they consciously try to preserve remembrance on their own and their nation's plight in their children. After the terrible Iraqi attack with chemical weapons on Kurdish people, Halim and his family watched the video that had depicted the event. Their kids were watching with them, because parents felt that they need to know and remember what happened. The girls had a hard time watching the video and got really upset. This brought the trauma back and some of the earlier symptoms reoccurred. Now Halim has some second thoughts whether or not he should have encouraged them to watch it.

The Karimis' messages to the community are the following:

Teachers and the community need to know why refugees come to Canada. They also need to learn that the Canadian way of living is not necessarily better than the way immigrants are used to in their home countries.

There should be more support for children while they are in transition to adjustment to a new culture. Lack of language skills is placing parents in an inferior, vulnerable position vis à vis the mainstream culture. Lack of recognition of their professional skills makes them feel humiliated, disrespected and sad.

Children in schools need to be more sympathetic to the needs of newcoming children.

Story of the Saids

Mohamed, his wife Nala and their five children lived in Somalia's capital Mogadishu. After the breakdown of dictatorship, a civil war that involved a number of former opposition parties started. Most of the political divisions were made along the clan's lines involving numerous militia troops that started looting and destroying everything on their way. No one was safe at that point. Armed militia and soldiers were breaking into people's houses, killing or torturing them for no apparent reason. To belong to a particular clan was a death penalty in those days.

When the Said's got the information that their area may be attacked they could not do anything else but leave instantly. At this moment their two oldest children were at the market place. There was no chance for them to search for each other. At that point in time it was already well known among Somalians, that Kenya should be their

destination where they could obtain valid documents and find refugee shelter. Kenya was 900 km away, and yet there was no other choice but to start walking. Occasionally, they were able to use some transportation, but most of the time they could only walk. The long journey lasted 6 months, because the family had to stop in every town to rest and check if their other two children were around. One day during the journey, Mohamed left to search for his children but could not manage to come back, because extreme violence occurred in the city. The family got separated even further. His disappearance impacted greatly on the three children who stayed with their mother. Mother as well feared for a long time that both her husband and lost children were all dead. They completely lost contact with Mohamed, and did not hear anything about him for another year. Finally, the word came to her that he was isolated during the violence and had to change his route but that he was well and intended to join them soon.

After over two years of being in a refugee shelter, the family, although without the two oldest children, got their documents to leave for Canada. Mohamed was still living apart from his wife and three younger children but his application was processed at the same time since the contact had been established. He finally joined them just in time to finish up the procedure and leave for Canada. Only a few days before they were scheduled to leave, they heard good news about their two youngsters. They were safe and in care of a distant family member. After five months of living in Canada, the Saids finally learned that their children finally managed to come to Kenya. They are starting a procedure to bring them here as soon as possible. Coming to Canada was a dream for the three children who went with their parents. Nice and peaceful life, even snow...all seemed so unreal. But their first experiences brought unexpected problems. Lack of language skills prevented them from explaining their feelings, and participating in activities with other children in their school. But they did learn that they are different, because of their skin colour. It surprises them how important and hurtful it is to live in the new environment while being "different". Desperate to make new friends and become part of a larger community, they have an extremely hard time both at school and outside of it. Their mother says that one of them is very angry, and two of them experience constant nightmares and serious struggles at school. One child is still bedwetting. The parents are still struggling to learn the language. They are hopeful that English will be the right ticket to life in Canada.

The Saids suggested that community considers the following activities to alleviate children's troubles and enhance the quality of life of refugee families:

Schools should be better promoters of diversity, anti-racism education and cross-cultural understanding. They should take a leadership role in assisting new refugee children with their settlement.

Refugee children have suffered greatly from trauma of war and refugee exile. Their inability to cope with the consequences is only complicated by their lack of language skills to verbalize the pain.

School programs should have more components that encourage social skills development for children from other cultures who have experienced war trauma.

The Experience of Interviewing

The families we interviewed were the families that both cultural assistants and I supported during the course of our work with immigrants. During that time all three of us had developed rapport with them. The distance between the service provider and client was minimized to the point that we were regarded as close as their friends. The power difference was also minimized since those families knew that we ourselves went through similar settlement experiences. At the same time, their experiences of war trauma made a difference. They said that it takes a lot of courage to talk about events in their home countries. First it is hard to talk about such horrifying experiences since it often brings back the emotional pain. Second, as one participant suggested, by revealing brutal, violent and disrespectful treatment they went through, one feels almost ashamed of their own ethnic, cultural group, or homeland. The qualitative progress in our relationship with refugee families was evident through the repeated contacts they initiated with us following the interviews in which they showed greater confidence and self-reliance than before. The three of us noticed that interviewing had an empowering effect for the families for at least two reasons. First, they were provided a chance to openly and freely talk about their concerns, but more importantly, they greatly benefited from the fact that they were listened to by a sympathetic listener when they shared their feelings. In addition to that, they shared with us that they were more comfortable talking to someone who although living here, still appreciates the culture from which they came originally. To illustrate his hesitancy to share the same content with someone from a culture other than his, one participant said:

> When I talk to you, it is as if I am talking to a friend back home. I see hope when I see you, and feel better than when I talk to someone who is in the same position as I am. I also feel good because I do not need to explain everything, and I am not scared to mention some things that people do not understand here. You know what I mean .... I often feel like I have to explain here that we are not barbarians, that we are no different than other Canadian people, but that we were only not as fortunate to enjoy the

> privileges of the western world...but isn't that all so irrelevant now .... I lost everything, none of the material things seem valuable to me. That is why I suffer so much from not having friends, neighbours and relatives here, that is all that matters...someone to talk to.

People we interviewed feel their nations are victimized, blamed or stereotyped by the media and public. However, the families participating stayed away from unreasonable blame. Moreover, they showed tremendous wisdom in pointing to the political circumstances that produced chaos in their countries. In a plain and easily understandable way they showed us that what they respect is common to all nations-peace, love, family, and friends. All of them have suffered tremendously, and lost their homes, their careers and material possessions. But it is strikingly clear how this was not emphasized by any of the families. The only things that truly mattered to them included people, dear but lost friends, relatives, and other loved ones. The families are aware that they have to start from scratch in Canada, and all they hope for is a decent life, that includes having a meaningful employment and the necessary means of supporting their family.

As much as hearing a story on refugee experience has become common to both the cultural assistants and myself throughout the course of our work, none of us had previously dealt with this issue in depth. Everyday realities and resettlement struggles often overshadow experiences of refugeeism. This is why this interviewing experience was unique even though the interviewees and interviewers knew each other quite well. The interviews lasted long enough to provide a whole retrospective on people's lives during the past few years. Listening to the stories had a lot of impact. One of the cultural assistants said:

> I identified with them all the time, I was angry, I was sad, I was proud...with them, my feelings came out openly like theirs. I did not hide my tears, and I was not uncomfortable with that.

Interview follow-ups helped the three of us to debrief, share our insights, exchange notes and clarify necessary details. The training and consultation session was helpful because it identified crucial issues. Most of the issues had to do with the emotional

component of the interviewing and the "no-harm" policy. We knew the families, and we knew a lot about their journey prior to interviewing, and we also knew a lot about their coping styles here and now, but some things remained unexpected. Inspite of our expectations there was still a lot that we had not heard before. In particular this information was related to the details of the families' darkest moments and testimonies of the deepest wounds of the refugee ordeal. D. Masser (1992) was right when she said that those are the things people do not typically say until they are asked. After a year of supporting the family from Bosnia, I learned for the first time about the rape experience. We talked about it, with the tape recorder switched off. I had to struggle with my own feelings while trying to be an attentive and supportive listener. The experience of rape became "one of the experiences" from the past. I was overwhelmed with dilemmas after the interview, both about whether the disclosure could be detrimental for her and whether my response was appropriate. I also felt devastated by the fact that there are hundreds of families that I have seen so far who may be have experiences like this to live with for the rest of their lives without sharing them with another person. Fortunately, a follow-up meeting assured me that everything was all right. The woman felt better that she had talked about her experience, our relationship remained intact, and the trust and confidence was intact.

Parents had a hard time talking about their children's trauma. Cultural assistants and I formed the impression that parents would rather underestimate their children's problems than take the chance of admitting that the problems could have a long-term impact. Their denial was obvious during our conversations since each revelation of a sign of trauma was accompanied with the comment "but everything is fine now." We heard the statement "My children are normal children" so many times that we could not help but feel that they are very fearful of the possible consequences that war trauma may leave on their children. With repeated assurance that indeed their children are normal children, we tried

to help parents realize that children's symptoms, no matter how strange, were a normal reaction to abnormal circumstances, and that some children prefer to talk about their experience and demand answers to the questions related to the experience. However, the parents could not help but try to minimize the harm, for the simple reason of giving their children the chance to forget:

> I hope that she does not remember any of those terrible things and I hope she will only remember those good things from the past. I think she is doing fine, she is a normal child. I am so proud of her. It is a really special feeling to learn that your child, who went through all of that is doing good in school. And she wants to learn too. She could hardly wait to start the school here.

The three stories are from the three different cultures, three parts of the world, three continents, and yet they share many similar messages. The ultimate message concerns the lives of these families in Canada and is a desperate cry for acceptance, understanding and appreciation. Moreover, it shows us their persistent striving to survive and outlive the horrible experiences and continue with an ordinary life in Canada.

Themes from the Interviews

The themes that evolved from the interviews were abstracted on the basis of a twofold principle. First, the themes emerged from the chronology of events that affected the lives of the refugee families. The critical incidents that occurred in their lives were different, so commonalties that allowed for the extraction of themes stem from feelings and thoughts that families reported about rather than events that caused them. For example, the interviewed families shared quite similar perceptions of the quality of their former lives, the impact that the war had on them, feelings of uprootedness, the struggle to survive and so on. The other important source for extraction of themes was my focus on identifying two specific variables, people's coping strategies and factors that promoted or buffered the war, refugee and settlement stresses.

The Idyllic Past

The past life, and for some of the families who were interviewed this meant going back for decades since their ordeal lasted so long, was the life they wanted to remember. Children wanted to remember their homes, their relatives, and friends, and they grieved when thinking of their loved ones who are still there. The lost cultural context involved possession of their own home, customs, and most importantly social network, that provided acceptance, safety, and a sense of belonging.

> We had everything we ever needed and wanted there. The house, the land, all of our relatives were either living in the village or in the nearby town. During the summer we would go with my husband to the Adriatic Sea, all four of us, and enjoy two or three weeks on the beaches, sunbathing, swimming....At home we would rarely spend a night without having a friend or a neighbour visiting or going to visit them. Kids would play outside during the long summer nights, and we adults would all sit outside, and just talk, laugh, and rest after the long day...

> I never had to worry about where the kids were going. Nothing could happen to them. Here, I am so scared that if they go out something terrible is going to happen. And this does not have anything to do with the war, because of what happened before. It is that they scare you here all the time with the news on the TV. The other day, they placed an information on the wall in the building that says that someone is maybe going to attack our children. I don't understand that. I came from a war, and unfortunately children were victims there too, but why would anyone attack a child here, why?

> Both me and my wife had careers there. As intellectuals we fought for the right thing there, and here we are none and nothing. I work in a factory, and it is not that I mind, but I sometimes ask myself, "what am I doing here?". I see how different I am from most of the people that work with me.

An 8 year old girl shared with me a drawing of the village she lived in . The title was "My Village." Her drawing (Figure 17) depicts her home placed in a far right corner of the paper. It is connected with several lines symbolizing the roads to other houses. Each house on the picture has a name of a dear person who lived there. I asked how it felt to be there and she answered:

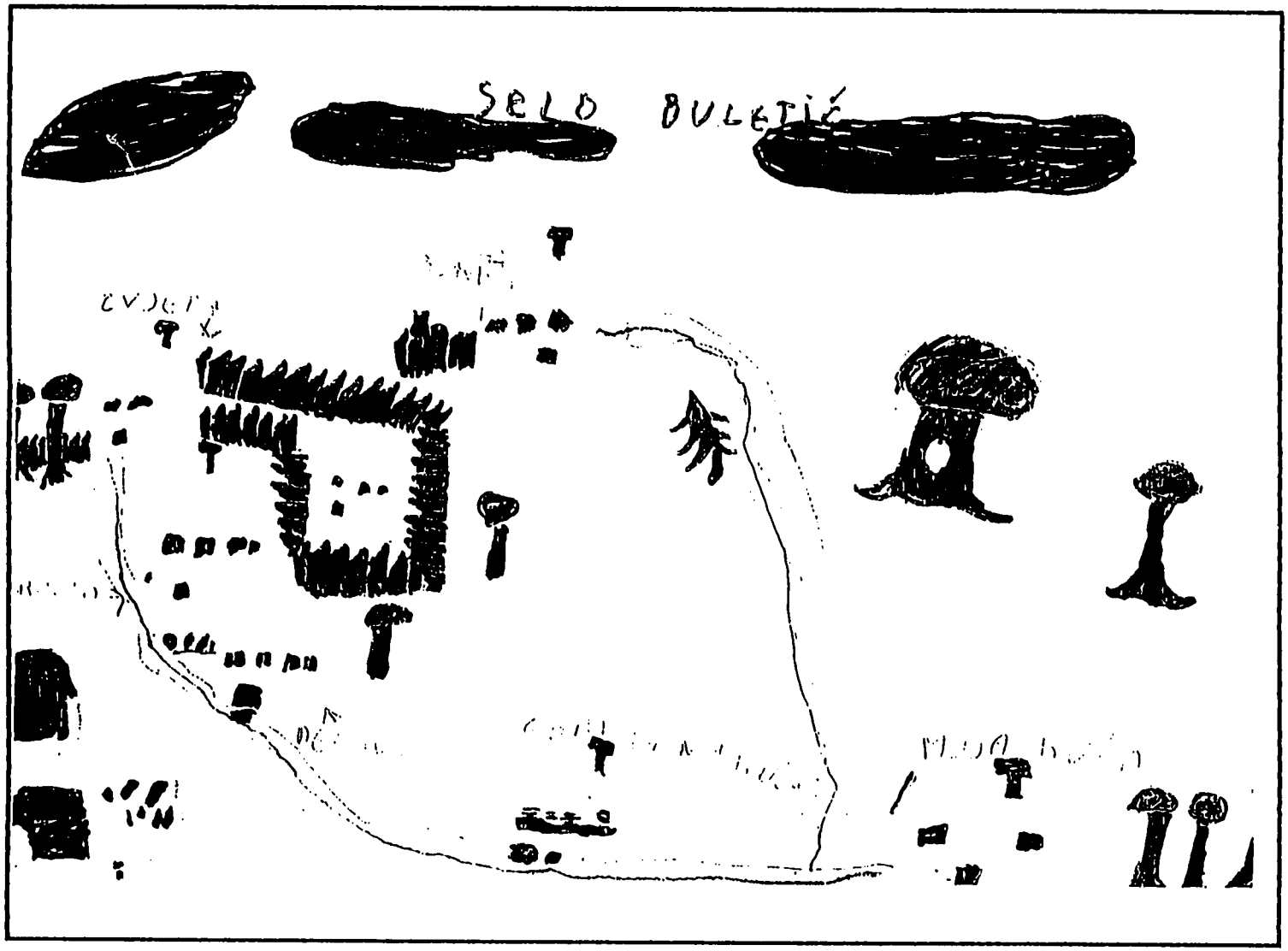

Figure 17. "My village"

> I had many friends, and I could go alone to visit them. It may not look like that on the picture, but everything was much closer than it is here. For example, in 15 minutes I could be with my friend there and we would play for a whole day.

The Experience of the Trauma of War

The interview participants provided insights into how it feels when ordinary, normal life begins to fall apart, and extraordinary, extreme and painful things slowly or suddenly take over. Perceptions of the deterioration of the social context although dominant, are mixed with confusion that triggers survival instincts and feelings of urgency. Aimless flight is the ultimate outcome of their struggle to survive that is either provoked by a sudden life threatening event, culmination of hardship, or unavailability of other choices. However, it was a decision that only allowed for temporary relief, considering the ordeal that the refugee flight imposed.

Denial and Disbelief as Coping Strategy

All three families confirmed that they lived some time in the chaotic situation trying to ignore and even adapt to war or war-like events by stretching their resources, patience, and focusing on the satisfaction of basic needs. The length of this phase of denial depended on many factors, such as intensity of pressures, type of pressures, existence of supports in the community, and individual and family resilience.

> It looks unbelievable now how we just did not want to accept the fact that something was wrong. People started talking about terrible things happening to others, and you listen and think that it is impossible; 'it happens but it will stop', or 'it will not happen to us'. I even used to get angry at all of those who would come and tell me that so and so was seen doing that and that. I would just say to them to mind their own business. And then all of a sudden, when it happened at your door, when someone insults you or even worse attacks you just because they are angry that their side is losing in those battles, you realize...but again you try to forget because you don't think of leaving. And also you again try to understand. I think that before we left we almost got used to anything except getting killed.

Adapting to Pressures and Persecution

Political or ethnic pressures and persecution produced a general sense of insecurity. However, unsafe life conditions did not necessarily provoke a decision to leave. Three families identified that they developed resilience that helped them cope with pressures. Their lives became adapted to the chaotic conditions in which they lived. Life without any pleasure took over, allowing just enough resources for bare survival. Tragedies of those who were losing their loved ones allowed them to feel lucky enough that they were alive. In other words, the very basic needs were, relatively speaking, continuously satisfied, but always in jeopardy. All the other higher order needs of the families were deprived.

> We only became desperate when pressures on our family continued and started being really nasty and so frequent that we finally realized that it was best not to leave house at all.

> One day I had to go out and try to find something to eat. The kids had to eat and I did not care if anything would happen to me, so I went out. A solder who just came from the front line saw me and said: "So you are walking here like ballerina while our guys are dying there, because of your people. I feel like taking you now with me and killing you," he said and pointed the rifle at me. "Are you asking for that?" I was desperate, but I was not scared at all, so I just said: "Do what you want. I have been living for over a year like an animal. My kids don't have food to eat, and there is no food for anyone. I don't care for my guys or your guys, kill me if you think that can make a difference." So he took me with him and brought me to one store. The Serbian woman who worked in the store then asked what happened and told him not to make fool of himself and to release me and so he did.

Life Threatening Crisis and the Decision to Leave

The decision to leave the country of repression is made under extreme stress and pressure. It took literally exposure to a direct life threatening situation before the families finally knew that there was no other way of handling the situation.

> My position was very critical. I was a member of the teaching staff in the University of Kurdistan and it was not easy to discuss my escape, even with my family. We left in secrecy and we left everything behind. We

could not even talk to my family or my wife's family. We were in the middle of the military zone...But we could not bear any more...It is so hard to express how angry and upset we felt when we left our home.

We just had to leave one day. We were in Mogadishu, and needed to get to the Kenyan border which was approximately nine hundred kilometers away. There was no other choice but to walk.

So we had to run, but where...and we did run, but again we did not know for how long, and I guess what kept us going was the thought that that was all just temporary madness.

The Journey of Humiliation and Hope

Refugee flight, as reported by the interviewed families, involved horrific, unforeseen dangers, humiliating treatments, and life threatening attacks. The threats that they survived, as horrible as they sound, could not diminish their hope, and obviously presented less danger than the situation they were leaving behind. People decided to engage in the unknown only for the sake of a possible end that would provide temporary safety. However, nothing the families planned provided guaranteed outcomes.

We decided to leave Mogadishu and needed to get to the Kenyan border which was approximately nine hundred kilometers away. Sometimes we used donkeys, sometimes tractors or cars, but most of the time we had no other transportation so we had to walk. It took us six months until we reached the Kenyan border. The worst part was that my husband got lost. When we came close to one big city, we settled there temporarily and he said he was going to look for our other two children who were missing...and he did not come back. We were only able to reunite after almost two years...

I knew that a lot of people who decided to leave disappeared, so that was a risk. I was counting that would not happen to me because I am a single mom and my son was only 17 so they would not do anything to us. But I had to pay a lot. I had to pay about 800 dollars to a soldier who was taking us to the first town, then to pay some taxes, like garbage and so on, which was ridiculous, because we did not even live in that town, it was just that everybody was trying to rip you off... and then I had to pay for the escort to the Hungarian border.

We escaped through the mountain and soon after that, not more than two hours, we were attacked by the Iraqi control point. They shot at us almost two thousand bullets and it was a miracle how we were lucky to pass that

> situation without harm. The second attack came from the airforce, and that was the critical point when my child started exhibiting very strange symptoms (convulsions). We got help at the Iraq/Iran border in one of the hospitals and then continued. Then we traveled through another bordering country and there again the airforce attacked us.

Lives in Transition

Between the refugee retreat and arrival in Canada, all of the families spent a considerable amount of time waiting for final resettlement. In most instances this meant a waiting period of at least two years, unless they could directly access some of the Canadian missions. In countries of exile most of the refugees rely on the help of humanitarian refugee organizations to look after resettlement arrangements with countries that accept new immigrants. That is a hard and long process. Most of these countries, including Canada primarily look for so called "economic classes" of potential immigrants. In comparison, the numbers of those who are accepted to immigrate on compassionate and humanitarian grounds are significantly fewer. Canada does accept a considerable number of refugees, but the demand is so overwhelming that for most applicants chances are very slim. Meanwhile, families usually live in extremely unfavourable conditions, such as those in refugee camps or other temporary shelters, with poor hygiene and nutrition being responsible for numerous illnesses.

> When we arrived in Canada, we took my daughter to the dentist and she had to have five teeth taken out. She was also so weak from constant bronchial problems, that doctor told me to be very careful about her nutrition.

> It took almost two years to get the landing papers. It was not a short time and I counted days and nights because my husband at that time was not with us...I gave his name and my children's names to the UNHCR...suddenly they informed me that they got my husband through another refugee camp, so we were reunited...but my two other children were still missing. Finally, after some of my relatives told me that they are safe in some place in Somalia, we continued with papers and I asked those relatives to help them to go to Kenya, so that we can contact them when we get here.

Children's Experiences

Several children contributed to the research with their own insights on what it was like during the war and refugee times. Their parents also recalled events that produced significant distress, as well as contributed with recollections of the overall atmosphere and how it impacted on their children. What follows is a documentation of children's experiences again presented in a chronological order. This section consists the data obtained from the children's drawings and interviews with them and their parents. The experiences of war and refugeeism will be followed by the presentation of the children's experiences of life in Canada. The themes and issues that form this section of the results emerged from family interviews, interviews with children, and observations given by the cultural assistants.

Experiencing Persecution

> I noticed the first reaction in my child when the Iraqi regime issued a central order to every Iraqi university lecturer to serve in Iraqi army and I was a teacher in the university and I did not have any experience with military, but I had to obey. My child probably felt the tension at home. Each time I had to go, she would hold me and cry at night and beg me not to leave her again...

A 10 year old girl provided her memories of trauma. On the picture, in a simple drawing (Figure 18), she depicted an airstrike she had experienced while in the refugee camp. The refugee camp was in Iran. The picture looks as if it was taken from the air. It shows tents everywhere, with women and children crying, animals wondering and people being killed. She called it "Kurdish Refugee Camp," and gave a modest explanation.

> This is the refugee camp with many people living in their tents. There are children living there too. The airplane is dropping bombs on them and killing many... The person in the plane is Sadam Hussein. He is doing that .... He killed many Kurdish people....

The interviewer noticed that one person holds a gun as well as that there are three big mortars in the picture. Knowing that civilians who were in the refugee camps had been unarmed, she decided to ask the girl about this detail. "I see some weapons here and some

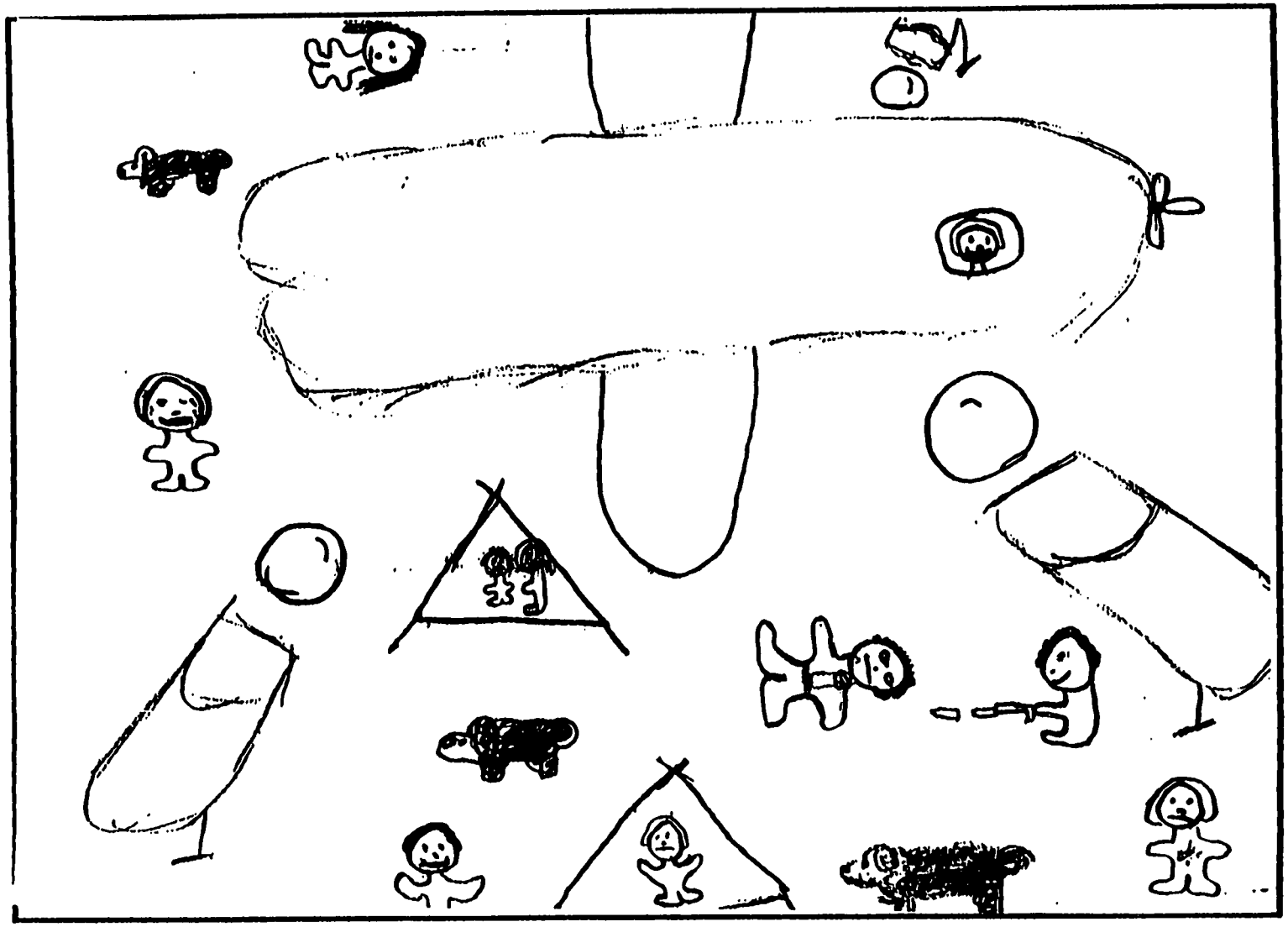

Figure 18. "Kurdish refugee camp"

people fighting. Were there any weapons like these in the refugee camp you lived in?" she asked. "No, refugees never have weapons, but this is what could had happen if we were armed- we would have responded, and maybe defended ourselves," she said.

Another child depicted his feelings about the past and present by drawing a very long pair of parallel lines, that represented a long road he has been walking on. The road was that long that it took him several papers placed together to draw it. There seemed to be no end to it. The cultural assistant also observed that the road was narrowing down which left her with an impression that future did not seem very bright to this boy. At the end he was not pleased with his picture and did not want to give it to the cultural assistant.

An eight year old girl drew a picture that symbolically depicted her family's separation from their homeland. She called it "My family" (Figure 19). The drawing is divided with a line into two separate sections, one showing the village they used to live in, and the other her family. Although she had not seen her father for three years, he was in the picture as well. The village stayed unfinished. A road to their house is cut by the line that divides pictures.

> This is my family. This is me, my brother, my mother and my father. We are here now. And my father will come soon, so he is in the picture here. The other side is our village. I did not finish it..."Why?"....I do not want to...It does not look the same if you look at it from that side. I will make another picture of the village...

Helplessness and angry thoughts, as a product of war experience, persist in memories of older children. They wish they could have been stronger, to resist, and respond. One mother said:

> My children still carry those pictures of horrors from Somalia, they carry them in their minds and their bodies. They tend to get upset, sad and very angry. Sometimes when they talk about those experiences, they get upset and start talking like they have to go there and do this and that, so I find that neither my children, nor I will ever forget what happened in Somalia, or maybe they will, but that will take a lot of time.

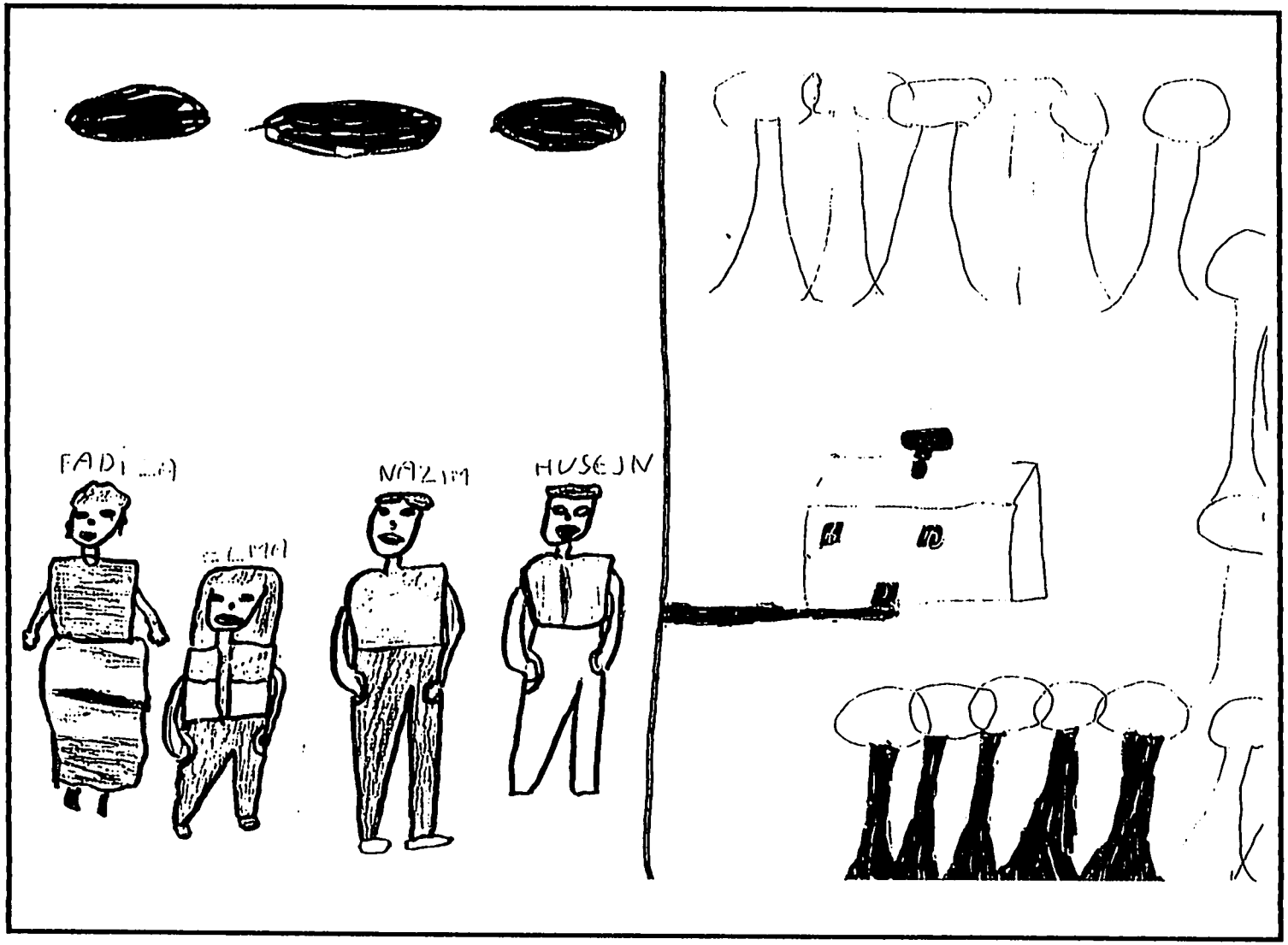

Figure 19. "My family"

Younger ones who stayed with their families expressed their feelings through development of numerous fears: of separation, death, dark, sudden light, noise and everything unknown. Seeing their parents' reactions allowed children to monitor the level of danger throughout their ordeal. Parents were aware of that and knew that their coping skills tremendously affected their children.

> She was like a thermometer of our mood. When we were happy she was laughing, she was happy, when we were scared she was scared. She was constantly monitoring our faces. My older daughter was six then. After a while, they both were continuously scared. They were always scared and questioning us about things and whether anything was wrong or if anything would get wrong. That lasted for two years, I think our children only started to live relatively normally when we arrived in Greece and decided to settle there temporarily.

Shocking scenes of people being killed, deepened the fears of the families and because of the brutal reality in which they lived had a great impact. Those experiences, according to parents, still effectively exist in the form of very vivid memories. Direct experience of trauma, such as being bombed or being directly attacked impacted in a different way. Children were suffering from states of shock, or convulsions following those events, with numerous long-term side effects following those episodes. Those long-term consequences included both physical and mental health problems. One mother related:

> The biggest impact this war had on my children was that they saw people being killed, hurt; they saw those atrocities being committed everywhere around them.
>
> When the bomb exploded in front of the house.where we lived, she went into a state of shock. She did not speak for weeks, she was shivering, would not stay alone at all, not even for a minute without one of us being around. I thought that she would never speak again.

For an older boy, a teenager then, recollections included a profound sense of isolation, fear, disappointment and disbelief. His friends became his enemies, slowly and

inevitably. He was forced to minimize his daily activities outside of the home which finally led to complete isolation.

> I just could not go out at all. My friends from school were out there doing all kinds of nasty stuff; all of a sudden they became so violent. At the beginning I did not want to pay much attention, but then I felt really unsafe when I realized that some of them started carrying weapons. I knew that it was only a matter of time before they were going to use them. But hiding in the house was not a real protection. That only assured them that I was afraid and then they intimidated me all the time by coming by my house, throwing things, intimidating my mother and so on. They got so powerful because their guys were winning in this war. It was hard...

Signs of Prolonged Distress and Trauma

All of the children experienced some of the symptoms of trauma. In some instances they were short-term responses to the immediate shock, such as stupor and inability to talk or convulsions. For all of the children of interviewed families, the symptoms of sleep disturbance, recollections of traumatic events and nightmares persisted throughout the period of a few years. The fears of the children are still present.

> My children experience sleeping troubles. And also they still ask me if Iraqi airforce can attack us here, are they going to reach us here. They are always trying to delay the bedtime. At the daytime, they usually ask questions demanding explanation for the whole thing: What happened there, how was it, how were we attacked, why were we attacked, and so I realize that they are still living through those fears and that is why they could not go to sleep.

Persistent symptoms, such as bed-wetting, continued to the present time. One mother documented her helplessness of dealing with it.

> My child is bedwetting. When I ask him what happened, he does not remember, he does not know. So I found out that my son has a difficulty, and I talked to my doctor, but he does not help us, not the way I wanted him to.

For some of the children resettlement brought the continuation of the traumatic symptoms. In this case, perceived lack of acceptance from the host community,

experiences of isolation and unexpected hostility in the new school environment contributed to the continuation of the stress symptoms.

> All three of them had nightmares all the time, and especially while they were still there, but now when they are in Canada, there is a different kind of nightmare because they are scared, scared of other people, scared to cooperate with other people. One of them is aggressive, very angry because of that.

Perseverance or reoccurrence of the symptoms is also related to children's exposure to adults' conversations regarding past experiences, and an inability or unwillingness of their families to put the past behind. The former trauma is usually still present in their homes, if for no other reason, then because some of their relatives may still be affected by it, or because their parents are going through the grieving process.

> I am trying so hard to hide when I feel upset about the past. It is not easy to hide that from children, and I know that it may mean something else for them. For example, I was upset last night when I heard that our assistance is going to be cut, I became so afraid because I am a single mother that I would not have enough to feed my children, and I started crying, quietly, while fixing the supper. My daughter could not sleep that night. Later I found out that she was worried that we may go again through the same thing here. I assured her that that is never going to happen. I think I was convincing, but you never know what is going on in their heads.

Sympathy for their own nation, and the political struggles of those who stayed behind is always present in refugee homes. It is not unusual that political issues continue to impact on their lives after the resettlement. Refugee families often continue to support their fellow citizens by providing them with moral, political or sometimes financial support while living in Canada. Many refugees feel that their children should learn about the issues affecting their nation, and see that type of learning as part of preserving their cultural heritage.

> When the Iraqi attack with chemical weapons happened, we were watching news all the time. We also got a video, and they saw it. and that was another time when all those memories came back to them and they were very upset and crying and could not sleep for few nights...that is why we decided not to show them any of those videos any more.

Detachment from Home and Extended Family

All of the families talked about the children being concerned about their relatives who were left behind. Children express deep grief with respect to the fact that loved ones are still exposed to the violence. In many traditional cultures, the extended family is just family, like the nuclear family is here. This means that often grandmothers, aunts or uncles have significant, and occasionally even more important roles in children's lives than their own parents. As much as preservation of a nuclear family is beneficial to children's well-being after trauma, absence of other significant family members is probably one of the most significant grieving issues for children. Ambivalent feelings about their new country is a critical contributor to this grief. On one hand the new country is a safe place to live, but the place with less than enough of the support that they need at the beginning. Family members are the people who were the major providers of these types of supports. Their wishes to bring their relatives to safety are therefore also motivated by the perceived lack of support in the new environment.

> We usually sit down together and we talk about the situation back then and my children are always asking us to bring our family here and not to leave them to live in that danger any more.

> One night she woke up and said: We need to go back. Why, I asked. We need to go back and bring Dena, Sira and Moni. I know they are unhappy. I want them here. I will share everything with them. They will be surprised with Canada a little bit but I will help them. And then I won't need anyone else to play with here. It will be like before.

Children's Life in Canada

Dreams Come True with First Impressions

Children did not and could not participate in making the decision to come to Canada. There are several reasons for that. First, their parents hardly had a real chance to make some informed choices while in exile. Many of them are just told where they would go and did not want to challenge the last opportunity to settle in safety. Sometimes, if a family is perceived as likely to settle faster, they may be presented with several choices of

countries that are open to immigration. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa are often mentioned as potential choices for resettlement.

> I had a choice between Sweden, Canada and New Zealand, and I chose Canada because of its great reputation. But that was the end of a few year struggle. For us Kurdish people, we do not have a state or a passport and it is very hard to get out of the country...because you do not have any original paper to travel with, so we escaped without papers and it took us three years to arrive to Canada, with passing through different and difficult channels.
>
> My daughters were very young to be able to make any decisions at the time. At first they did not understand why we came here, but when they grew up a little bit, they are becoming aware of the conflict back home, and they think that we made a good decision.

It seems that "post factum," children support their parents' decisions. After a long-term ordeal, children appreciated and even idealized the picture of the life in North America. Most of them say they were delighted to go to Canada. The vision of a new country was idealistic, promising, soothing after the ordeal they went through.

> I was very happy when I heard that we were going to Canada. We did not know mommy and daddy decided that we are going to Canada.
>
> I thought it was like coming to a wonderland. I thought you have to be rich if you live there and you also have to choose from so many nice things, like clothes, food, toys and everything. I did not think we were going to be poor.
>
> I was worried about going but I never thought that anything wrong could go here. I just thought it is like coming to heaven.
>
> I was dreaming that Canada is green, green and big, big city, no snipers, no one can do anything to you, you can go anywhere you want and be safe. At the airport I saw people who were greeting us and I told mom: Mom, my imagination became true!

Two or three months later, the same boy, mom adds, had approached her with this dream:

> He woke up scared one night and told me he dreamt about Canada again, and this time he said he saw only big, big animals, wild animals everywhere...

Starting a new life in Canada brought both joys but also painful experiences. Overall, parents say, children are happy in Canada, appreciating their new environment, stability and peace of everyday living. Basic existential needs and need for safety, are satisfied and now less important. Their children enjoy the pleasant surrounding, a variety of stimulating activities, such as educational and play materials at school, TV, or recreational activities. But socializing with others seems to be by far the strongest barrier to their full satisfaction. There are at least several components that contribute to the social isolation.

Language Struggles

Lack of language skills presents the most often cited barrier to social integration. Like their parents, the refugee children who have no language skills encounter a variety of problems, from not being able to express themselves or participate in activities of other children, to being teased and perceived by peers as not being smart enough.

> They talk about something and I do not understand anything. I have to look at other people so that I can find out a little bit about what the teacher is talking. My teacher is good, but I am sad that I cannot tell her what I know. I know how to write and read, and I also like to go to school. I am so sad when I cannot do something because I did not understand it.

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is the most harmful of all the difficulties that children encounter. Both covert and overt expressions of hate and racism caught some of the children initially by surprise but eventually confused and hurt them. For children who have not been exposed to racial tensions before, this brings a new dimension to their socializing struggles. They do not know how to respond to racism and nor do they understand where it is coming from.

> I like to be friend of Judy, Peter, Keenan, but I am not. I never realized I am black child, but coming to this school I find out that we are few blacks in the class, and we are few immigrants who cannot speak language and I don't know what to do. I am not happy going to school.

> My children come home and ask those questions, like Mommy, why are we different, why other children do not like us, what happened, and my heart breaks...Then I decide to go to talk to their teachers, but I have a difficulty with language. I cannot explain to the teacher what I want, but because I am hurt I go and use my fingers sometimes. Sometimes they also hire an interpreter who comes from the Multicultural Centre.

Parents feel that in order to address this issue both their and their children's language skills need to be strong enough to allow for meaningful communication, so for some time they have no other choice but to rely solely on the ESL teacher's sensitivity and understanding. "But, by the time communication can take place it becomes harder to talk about it," says one mother.

Gap in Schooling

While refugee families seek resettlement, their children quite often spend a significant amount of time away from school. This causes additional strain when they finally arrive in Canada. Not only do they have to acquire English, but often at the same time they need to compensate for the missed schooling. For those who had some schooling before, especially if not interrupted for over a year or two, this does not appear as a major problem since schooling here is typically regarded as "easier" than in other places of the world which usually have very traditional and demanding programs. Children of primary grade ages are affected the most. Often, the war circumstances prevent them from starting school on time. Time in exile is a transitional time without regularly established and institutionalized schooling. Even if they are attending the school, it is on an irregular basis, in improvised classes with mixed grades, and mostly for the sake of acquiring basic heritage language skills. Those children find school to be very frustrating due to the academic demands and language difficulties.

> My son is now feeling better, because his father works with him at home all the time and his English is improving, but at the beginning it seemed as if he was stupid according to his age, and I could even get that kind of impression from the teachers, until I finally explained.

> My daughter was so eager to start the "real" school. When we arrived, she was already 8, and started grade 3, and in fact she never went to school, unless you want to count those couple of months in the refugee camp. Even though everything was so new to her, she was so brave and so interested that I did not worry about it, until one day a teacher said that I should work with her on her math skills because she is still using her fingers when doing addition and subtraction.

However, other children experience more serious troubles at school. Although the language acquisition process requires considerable time, for most of the children dealing with academic issues is less challenging than dealing with the process of adjustment to social life. According to their parents, socializing with others is a struggle that poses overwhelming demands on newcomer children. Children tend to get discouraged if there are no supports from peers of the same ethnic group in school. As a consequence, it is not uncommon that they sometimes try to overcome the pressures by using aggressive strategies.

> I talk sometimes with the teacher in the school but I did not have any ability to say what I really want. My English is not enough to communicate with the teacher. Sometimes teachers call me, they tell me your children are aggressive, they punch other children...but I try to explain to them that this is because that is the only thing they can do-to show them their power...The only power they have and that is their fists. I don't like fighting, because even though there is a zero tolerance for this in school, in my country also was a zero tolerance, but when you are in the big environment and you are the only fish in that environment and you can not swim what else can you do, you bite the nearest one, and that is why my children are doing that, not because the are aggressive, but because they can not communicate, they can not make friendships, they can not join other children, I feel frustrated for them.

Life in Isolation

Even when all of the other factors seemingly work to the advantage of a child's integration, the lack of a consistent social network, or the presence of one that is unsupportive or even stress-inducing, affects the prospects of integration. Life in isolation does not mean that there is no network at all, but that the one that exists is not working to the advantage of social integration. The housing opportunities in the KW area almost

exclusively force people to live in subdivisions and housing complexes with a large population of immigrants, where again they mostly interact with people who are more or less in the same situation. The presence of the same ethnic or a cultural group may be at the same time stress-buffering as well as stress-promoting factor. As one of the interviewees says:

> I am glad that we have X, Y, Z, here, in the same building. That is so helpful, if God forbidden something happens and I need someone to help me, or just if something goes wrong. Also, it helps when you do not have anywhere to go, you go to your neighbour who speaks the same language, and you feel better. But as much as I feel better when I hear that someone is going through similar troubles here like me, I also do not want to listen to that sometimes. I want to hear nice things sometimes, happy endings, not whining, and whining, and whining. It is not something I can change I know, but sometimes I feel like going somewhere where I can talk to someone who does not have troubles like we do.

An adolescent documented his loneliness through comparison of native and new cultures as well as through his own, personal experience.

> Where I grew up, people used to spend a lot of time outside, just talking, or walking, in the evening. As long as the weather would permit you, there was no way you could skip going out for at least an hour in the evening to meet friends. And that did not cost anything. So if things were different here, I would have been doing the same, but no, here, everyone is in their homes. Also there are no cafes, or places for young people to meet, at least I don't know of them. I only have one friend from school, and he lives far away, so I can hardly see him outside of the school.

The social isolation is not necessarily linked to the lack of opportunities to meet people or mobility to find new friends. It may also be the product of cultural differences and norms of socializing between the original and the new culture. Two interviewed adolescents claimed that in general there are fewer opportunities here to find ways of interaction that they used to have in their home country. Another participant explained cultural differences in socializing in a similar form:

> We are now kind of used to situation here and we settled down completely, although the life is very different here from the one back home. The life here is very quiet and not active as in the Middle East

> countries. Here you feel like living in a huge country with a less population and communication is very weak and everybody is just taking care of their own life and I feel like I am repeating the same routine every day.

Need for Friends

One mother illustrated the importance of a supportive social network here, especially for children like hers, who went through a serious trauma. She ascribed a healing effect to a social network, and consequently sees her children's isolation at home with her own family as perpetuating their problems and memories.

> My children need friends, because when you are a child and you have someone you can play with and you can interact, it is easy to forget whatever you have, you will slowly forget, but if you are alone and coming home and he sees just his mom, that's why my children remember their experiences, their bad experiences.

Friends from the same ethnic group seem to be the most preferable source of comfort and support for newcomers. The isolation and lack of information at the beginning became unbearable for this family, to the point that they had to actively seek opportunities to find someone.

> Yes, we had assistance from the church but even though the church found the place for us to live and helped us financially, we still needed more from our own people, someone who speaks our language. So one day I went to the bus station and met another Somali family and then they referred us to the Multicultural centre, where cultural assistant helped us with basic information, including one on where do most Somalis live, so we could go and talk to people and maybe find some relatives.

> I just like that there are some people here from my country. I do not even care who they are, you know what I mean, just that they are friendly. I am ready to forget everything because this is a new life that we are all starting here.

Expectations from School

School is unanimously identified by parents as one of the major potential sources of support for their children. All parents put very high expectations into the Canadian school system. Expectations range from learning language, academic

improvement, to satisfaction of needs for socializing. Its most important role, however, is perceived with respect to acculturation.

> I think that the environment at school is very important to help children to cope with the past by offering them games and stories related to their past and helping them with it in the future, what makes a big difference in their life, and for the teacher to be more sensitive of their needs and to try to spend more time with them and not to hesitate to call the family and to have better communication, that will help to ease the children' struggles at the beginning.

> The only thing that can help my children overcome their trauma is to help them feel better in school. If only in school they could extend a welcoming hand, and not just say that they are aggressive. If they could only find the way to talk to them, help them open, they could open easily, and will tell what happened and after that they will readjust step by step, not at once and they would feel much better. But if they treat them as strangers, they will always have a hard time.

School is recognized as a preferable source of educational but also social supports. Parents obviously care whether their children receive sufficient fulfillment of both while getting accustomed to the new surroundings. The war trauma and refugeeism are perceived as being successfully overcome with adequate social supports. Parents and children's perceptions, especially if the latter are in their teenage years, may significantly differ. While mother sees school as a primary source of academic improvement, her son emphasizes the fact that socially, he is very lonely for the time being.

> The school helped my daughter and son a lot. They feel they are back into the normal routine, they learn, they feel this is the normal life.

> But her son adds:

> Yes mom, but we do not feel like in our school before. I can only learn, and learn whole day and pretend that everything is fine, but it is so hard when you enter that big room during the lunch and there is no one to talk to, and everyone looks at you like you are so strange.

> We have great teachers, but they cannot do much for us when it comes to other students accepting us. Until we feel confident in English, they will ignore us.

Family Strengths and Challenges

The three interviewed families thought that they had done their best to protect and support each other during the refugee ordeal. They confirmed that under the circumstances trust in each other and patience had meant the most. The father of the family, when he was present, seemed to preserve the leadership role. However, when he was not there, the mother became the head of the family, and the older children took on responsibilities for which they would not normally be accountable.

Supports Within the Family

All of the interviewed families emphasized the importance of the family being supportive during the difficult times. They feel that they were lucky to be together for most of the time.

> I think it is important that we trusted each other all the time, that we stayed together, and prayed together. We cannot forget what happened, but all of this showed us how important our family is to all of us. I cannot even imagine what could have happened if we were separated from each other, or if anything happened to one of us. Everyday, we consider ourselves being lucky for getting out of the situation without harm.

The strength of the family was emphasized as an important source of support for newcomers. Family values embodied in the cultural tradition, good quality communication with each other and sharing the same beliefs were defined as important characteristics of a supportive family.

> I think our strength is in our ideals, our family tradition, and our communication with each other... beside that our belief is the most important thing and it is very important not to sacrifice our belief.

War circumstances, refugee flight and finally resettlement, however, challenged some of the traditional roles and values. Gender roles, generational roles, even traditional parental care were changed during the war and refugee times. Some of those changes remain to the present time. Typically, those family members who had the skills and

strength to provide support have been doing so regardless of their original role in the family.

> My son replaced his father entirely in his absence. I had to protect him when we were in the war, fearing that they may take him away, and even then he was looking after the younger one, and who knows how many times had to explain to her what was going on. After we left and came to the refugee camp, he was the one who helped with everything. Today, he is the one who takes little one to the doctor... what can I do, I cannot speak language at all.

War brutalities in some instances deeply affected most of the family so family members who were more resilient were forced to act as supports for the rest of the family. For all the interviewed families traumatic experiences are still there, present, but often not spoken about. How this silence affects family ties and whether this is beneficial rather than harmful is hard to know. The silence seems to be a legitimate and an accepted coping strategy for adults. Families do not deny it. Moreover, they are convinced that it works well for them, to just try to put the past behind.

A young man, for example, silently supported the testimony of rape given by his mother. There were numerous signs in his body language telling me how he felt, while we talked about this. Yet it was all embodied in silence. When asked how it had felt then, he just said "Hard." "And how do you feel now?" "It is still hard". His mother talked about it in his presence, appearing as if she needs his support while talking about it:

> My son is the only one who knows I was raped...I told him that for me it meant that two of them will stay unharmed... I told him that I was okay. It could have been worse...I know he understands.

Most of the younger children had to cope with trauma by entirely relying on their parents' assurance that everything was going to be all right. However, very little gave them reason to believe that time without worries was going to come. For the families, mutual support and togetherness meant the most. But experiencing powerlessness for such a prolonged period of time, affected their way of coping, and the ability to convince their children that resolution follows.

> Now that we are here, I cannot just say "it is going to be better". My children need proof for that. And they are fearsome that another trouble is coming up. You see, we have been going through so much hardship that it seems as if it is never going to end. I hug my kid and say it is going to be okay but I think they trust less and less, because there has been so much going on in their lives. And they see me. They know I am not happy here. I cannot hide that.

Families Separated

Two out of the three interviewed families experienced family separation during the refugee ordeal. For one, family separation continued at the time of the interview. The husband had been away for over three years. The wife did not know anything about his whereabouts. The other family experienced both temporary and long-term separation that was very dramatic. Two of the oldest children are still away, and the husband who was searching for them did not come back up until they had to leave for Canada. For the children this was an extremely threatening situation, because their father was a major source of support. Losing him meant more than going through all the horrors of war, according to the mother.

> I thought that he was probably dead. My younger children kept on asking, where is daddy, what happened to my older brother and sister, and I could only assure them that it was going to be all right, God will help us and them to come safe...(cries and says she cannot speak about that any more).

Lack of Control/Uncertainty

Throughout the interviewing, families documented that they just had not had a chance to talk, or share their feelings or fears during the exile. "It was a pure fight for survival," one of them said. Therefore their children often did not get the answers they were hoping for to assure them of upcoming safety. Instead, many times parents could only calm them down temporarily. They also admit that after a while their answers were only simple and honest "I do not know":

> I could not lie to my children when it was so obvious that nothing was right and that we cannot do anything about changing the situation. I think the only thing they knew was that we would do our best...and nothing else.

> They got used to that. But nowadays, I think that they must feel that we are weak, that we could have done better, that we could have done more here in Canada...I hope they do not blame us for things they do not like here.

When faced with a complete lack of control over their lives, the families had to rely on their religious beliefs as their only source of strength. Cultural tradition that demanded perseverance, and religious beliefs have been the only support people could find while withstanding prolonged stress.

> We cannot forget what happened with our lives, and it will always count, because we are human beings. We lost families, people, institutions, country, so the only way of coping is asking the God to help us...to extend his hand to come united with each of us...that is the only way to help... we pray every time, every time we say Thanks God, that we are safe, please extend your hand to other people as well, give them faith to survive.

Illness, Injury or Inability of a Parent to Cope

Some form of family disruption often accompanies war trauma and refugee flight. Problems that parents experience are witnessed by their children. Again, little or no explanation could sometimes be given since there are few answers for adults as well.

"My wife was very sick," was all one of the participants said. The interviewer added that she had severe mental health problems which occurred after the repeated bomb attacks that had reminded her of the experience she had before. It took her several months to deal with this trauma, during which her husband was the only one who was able to take care of the whole family. Another participant says:

> I wish I could say that we felt strong all the time, but I know how helpless and desperate we were, and I as a male had to suppress that and to keep encouraging everybody to endure. I often felt as I would rather die than continue like that. I was also so angry that we were in such an awful position that I could not tolerate anything from anyone in my family.

Settlement and Continued Stress

By the time the family reaches the safety of the country of final resettlement, such as Canada, deprivation from satisfaction of basic needs becomes chronic. The first few months spent in the new country, although filled with confusion, allowed newcomers to

finally experience safety and the fulfillment of basic needs. At the very beginning these satisfactions are quite sufficient for the family allowing them to consolidate their thoughts and experience final relief. The fact that this is the end of a journey typically looks very promising since families reported fascination with the wealth of this country and its desirable standard of living. However, daily interactions with people in similar positions, facilitated by typical housing and school arrangements, exposed newcomers almost right away to the not so bright picture of life for recent immigrants in Canada. The stories that they hear from others in similar situations bring cruel disillusionment together with resistance to accept or anticipate the same for oneself.

> You first hear these stories, like no jobs, be happy if you find factory work, forget about your career, Canadians hate us, nobody likes immigrants here, and at first you just resent those people who give you bad news, but then, when this news become truth, it is really upsetting...

Along with the language barrier, lack of jobs that may provide for independent living is widely mentioned as a most significant barrier to completion of social integration. Families are aware of the limited opportunities and see almost no hope for continuation of their former careers. Struggles to survive and obtain independence can in some instances put them in a situation that has no way out.

> We came to Canada as political refugees, sponsored by the Canadian government for one year. I started to work after six months because I did not want to be totally dependent on assistance...I think we lost all of the privileges of the society that we used to have back home. In our country we had a good standard of life before the war. We are not satisfied here, we are very disappointed. Here me and my wife lost our careers, everything...even if we got recognition for our degrees it would be still hard to find job...There is no equal opportunity for us here. When they recognize your degree there is still not an opportunity to practice and to be an active member in Canadian society. You feel as if every door is closed in front of you. We both work in factories now, and I don't think that is ever going to change.

The refugees who were sponsored during their first year by the Canadian government get a good opportunity to learn the English language and this sometimes

allows for a better start with a job search. However, the situation is much more complicated if refugees are sponsored by a so called "group sponsorship" where a group of private individuals agrees with immigration officials to support newly arrived refugees with their basic needs during their first year in Canada. Often, however, due to financial constraints, people sponsored this way are pressured to become self-sufficient as soon as possible, and many cannot afford to take enough English classes before starting the job search. Then, like one of our participants suggested:

> "You are in real trouble" because you may end up with a job...very, very low paid one, because only not so good employers take people with no language skills, and you just never get a chance for anything better.

Cultural assistants confirmed that in their settlement service practice the outcomes of job search struggles are crucial determinants of integration. Once sufficient employment is obtained, most of the refugees start spontaneously to overcome other integration barriers. Therefore, finding a decent job seems to be the most satisfying, yet hardest to accomplish goal. As a cultural assistant suggested:

> It is so obvious how job finding contributes to people's self-esteem and self-reliance. All of a sudden, they feel confident, seem to be getting around easily, understand and accept the community and society. Unfortunately, that happens only after a prolonged and painful process of cultural integration, numerous rejections, adjustments of career plans, and compromises that are unfair, where both society and the individual lose.

Community Awareness about Refugee Trauma

We finally asked families to share with us how they feel about the Canadian community learning about their experiences. They responded that it would be great if Canadians could learn from them in an open, direct dialogue. Moreover, dialogue of this kind would allow for their own competence building by providing them with active participation in the society.

> Yes, I think that Canadians should know about our experiences and I think they should know about what we faced and what kind of problem our

> children faced until we settled in Canada. I think the most important thing is for the agencies and schools and hospitals to know about our situation and I think that we are the best people to talk about those experiences. I once did that in one of the schools and...I think this kind of activity is very important and...I feel like I did something good for myself and for my children and for people who are in my situation, to let people know about my story and to let people feel how we feel so that we are not misjudged.

However, some of the interviewed adults felt that the media coverage of what is going on in war affected regions is enough. Although quite disappointed by often biased and somewhat ignorant coverage of these events, families do not see themselves as getting more involved in talks about war experiences. They do not want to talk about their personal experiences unless the purpose for it is clear to them, such as action that may facilitate their children's' or their own integration. They would prefer the community and society at large to be able to be an active, non-prejudiced, respectful and open listener, instead of just a curious one. That would assure them that what they went through may serve as a mutual learning experience from which both sides can benefit.

> We need to be communicating .... Our experiences unfortunately, are the part of the life on this planet ..., and they need to be opened to others, entirely, ... not just some parts of it that are easy to grab attention .... We need to point to the dehumanizing nature of political and economic struggles in this world .... I know we need to have patience for the other part... we affect people... but we need patience from the other side as well ...And so do our children.

Focus Group Interview with English as a Second Language Teachers

Two focus group interviews were held during the winter of 1995/96 with English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. The first focus group interview took place at the Waterloo County Board of Education site, where six high school teachers and heads of ESL departments attended the meeting. This interview lasted almost three hours. Teachers who chose to participate showed a great deal of cohesiveness as a group. The group appeared to be homogeneous in terms of understanding the issue, showing enthusiasm, reflecting on other participants' thoughts, and sharing the information. The

group also shared a great deal of empathy when talking about refugee children experiences. On two occasions, during the session, I was asked to switch off the recorder. In both instances, the participants did not feel comfortable because their testimonies were accompanied with strong emotional reactions. The interview was a two-way process, conversation that led to an exchange of a variety of information regarding the needs and resources in the community to serve refugee students. At the beginning, the thesis goals and objectives were presented, followed by a brief report on the developments in the community that led to the thesis, and current activities of the Working Group for Children Survivors of War Trauma. Then, the interview guide format was introduced with the areas of inquiry that were planned to be covered.

The second focus group interview took place at Rosemount Public School where 15 elementary school ESL teachers participated. Initially, 20 teachers were selected to be invited. All of the invited teachers were from schools that had over 40 registered ESL students in 1995. In addition to this, three itinerant teachers were also invited. These teachers provide ESL instruction and support in schools where there is no permanent ESL staff. It was anticipated that due to this fact, their perceptions may significantly differ from those of others since their students represent an absolute minority in schools they attend. This interview lasted for two and a half hours, and the process of introduction was the same. Since the group was much larger than the first time, the interview guidelines were supported by more directive facilitation. Teachers' contributions to the discussion were different this time, primarily due to the size of the group and the fact that some of the teachers did not know each other. First, their contributions were less personal and emotional, although sometimes equally striking. Secondly, it was evident that this group had diverse views of what should be priorities when dealing with refugee children. Finally, I observed that this group appeared to be less homogenous in terms of the core values and priorities that dominate their work. While some of the participants showed high sensitivity

and awareness of social justice issues affecting refugee children and families, others were more comfortable discussing educational aspects of children's integration. However, the discussion went on smoothly. The interview protocols from both sessions were combined, entirely transcribed, and searched for common themes.

The Experience of Trauma from Teacher's Perspective

Sharing the trauma experience, especially a personal one. is not part of the everyday student-teacher communication. ESL teachers, however, get a unique opportunity to work with smaller groups of children in their classrooms, which facilitates the disclosure of more personal issues, as well as an opportunity for follow-up on an individual basis. However, far more often, according to the teachers, this information is withheld completely. Hearing the actual story about the war, persecution and refugee experience is therefore rather an exception than the rule in the ESL classroom. Nevertheless, the issue of multiple victimization and overwhelming experiences from both former and their new country opened up the section on how teachers see refugee children.

> ...these kids are victims of so much, so many neglects...the wars...the need to move not being their decision... the lack of information that reaches them...those are all big people problems...they are ignored...and then when they get here often they are dependent upon too...then because they do learn fast, the responsibilities start to grow upon them, and I really don't know how they do it ...

> English does not have anything to do with their trauma...because they acquired English all of their wounds will not be healed, the wounds remain there, and some of them are very raw because they never get the opportunity to share, but here is a former refugee, learning English, finished high school, graduated, working, but has not come to grips with the fact that he had to leave his country and I don't think they'll ever be the same.

Several teachers identified that it would be beneficial to them to learn about those events in a child's life that may be impacting their present lives. Although this information could theoretically be gathered during the intake interviews, most of the teachers said that

they would personally be quite uncomfortable asking parents for any type of sensitive information, with or without use of an interpreter.

> I don't feel like coming with a pad and pencil and drilling them with questions like that. I heard four years later, from a student, that they remembered exactly what I was wearing, and that I had a smile and that I was welcoming or something and that they knew that everything was going to be O.K. It is obvious that first impressions have enormous impact...

Participants almost unanimously agreed that gathering information related to possible war trauma and other events that accompanied their refugee experience could do more harm than good at the early stage when establishing the trust seems to be the priority. On the other hand, there is a consensus that knowing some of the information on students' experiences may be of crucial importance for teachers in order to avoid further harm. Some teachers identified that within their schools, the administration had been working on developing a system that would allow for teachers to have some free time to conduct intake interviews with interpreters within the first week of being in school. However, it is very hard to envision how those situations would not turn out to be too intrusive to newcomers. In addition to that, teachers recognized that sensitive information of that kind requires certain skills that go beyond their confidence level.

> We have a place in our student profile sheets for family history. When we get a chance to interview them and we have an interpreter it still feels strange. I find it very difficult to ask questions, and I do not feel confident asking those questions, I do not know how to do it. On the other hand if a student is with us for a year or more and I get a story from them, and that tells you that they are comfortable sharing that experience with you then it means it is the time, then we open up and we talk about it.

Disclosures that Heal

Teachers usually hear about those experiences during a field trip, through journals, creative writing, or art activities, such as drama or painting.

> It all started by the kids just doing collage...collection of pictures...and everybody else had pictures of perfumes, big cars and that kind of stuff. Hers were all violent pictures that she ripped out of magazines. So I said:

> Why is your collage so different from everybody else's, and she told that terrible story about the Christmas day when her friend persuaded her to go to the beach. Her family had asked her to stay at home but she went with her friend to the beach...she came back to find her family had been killed, massacred...so she had all kinds of feelings and they just spilled out, and I thought "Is this a healing or is this a terrible thing that is happening to her now," and then she came and she said "that's why I am in this collage" and she asked if she can speak about this in her class...and that was her oral presentation to the class.... finally I had a feeling that that was a real healing process. But I do find in general that sometimes the moment either gets passed by or doesn't happen because we are at the end of the class and that's why we struggle....

The willingness to share their experiences seems to be there for most of the students who feel comfortable with their teachers. The problem is that there are usually only a very few chances to talk about their experiences. In the high school, special occasions, or opportunities for interaction outside of the curriculum activities, spontaneously brought everybody to the point of sharing their experiences.

> One day we had an assembly just for women, something dealing with alternative professions, and only women could go and all the men had to stay in their classrooms.... I was in the classroom with the group of ESL boys and I didn't really plan anything and we just decided to talk, and it was...I don't know how it happened, all of a sudden we started talking about the torture...and it came from them, it did not come from me at all... and it was just, I think one person started talking about his brother and what happened to him, and after the next one talked about himself and torture with electrodes, electrocution, and what he had gone through, the next started... talked, and they all had either personal experience or ...that was the incredible experience for me, I still have a hard time talking about it...I was wondering why they never did this before, the girls weren't there, and they did not know me a lot, but one student did and then my relationship with all these guys changed completely,...they would later come and talk to me... it was so good, it had such a healing effect...

Sometimes, however, disclosures of traumatic experiences do not happen intentionally, but rather as a consequence of the incidents that came out in uncontrollable way. The real cause of the following incident was trauma, and the teacher eventually became aware of it, but only after being faced with an extremely dangerous situation.

Recollections of traumatic experiences triggered an aggressive reaction in a seemingly benign situation.

> I had a Vietnamese boy when I first started teaching ESL and he turned on me with the knife and there was that...we never had a problem before, it was in geography class, and he did attack me and went away and then he came back...I was scared, but he just apologized, and explained to me that what I 'd done reminded him of the geography teacher that made him go around on the floor as a pig and he was spat on...and it was just something I had said, I can't even remember the exact thing I had done but it was a sort of a flashback and he got aggressive and he told me what this teacher used to force him to do because he was from the other part of Vietnam. He was constantly being punished in the classroom in the most brutal way, with all the force and with a whip...this situation just brought back everything, I think it was something in the lesson in geography that triggered it. I was so lucky that he talked to me about it...He did not graduate...I don't know what he is doing now, but it was very hard to deal with it...

Younger students more often use non-verbal ways of expressing their feelings, particularly at the beginning, because of the language barrier.

> My students are very quiet, I have pictures in my desk when I first started having a lot of refugee students coming...I have that picture of a girl who had a picture of police having both of her parents taken away. I can still feel the horror and this was a little grade one girl...we were watching it and then she started x-in the picture, actually those policemen, and then we both started doing it. There was no communication verbally, but only through the eyes.

Some of the traumatic experiences stay covered up, while a variety of behavioural problems start occurring in the school situation. Teachers are aware that in many instances because of the unspoken pain, their students face misjudgment, lack of understanding and uncompromised consequences.

> In early years when ESL was only established, they had little kind of sensitivity that we're growing in now, because they treated them as behavioural problems and I remember once I finally sat down with a student and divided the paper in three and said: Here is Vietnam, here's how you got here and this is here in Canada and stories that came out were unbelievable and they tried to find the words for like rape, and how they took all the women downstairs...

Once the language skills are acquired, students may come up with an articulate way of presenting their experiences in the plain language that describes their ordeal. Journals, essays, and other written assignments are typically forms of expression and disclosure of the most personal experience, including the traumatic ones. Once the trust is established with the teacher, students are quite comfortable sharing these themes.

> I had one boy, this was a 14 year old Central American boy...very disoriented during the first few months, but extremely nice fellow..., and we were doing a poetry writing in this particular class, and then again they had to find pictures to illustrate the poem's focus, and he found a picture...it was a little gruesome, sort of a world war type of picture with guns and so on...and I asked "well where did you find your picture," and then the whole story came out...just shortly before he came here he was forced to join the guerrilla fighters...he was involved in some kind of guerrilla fight himself, and his best friend, they captured them, forced them to lay on the ground and they shot his friend right there and he said he ran... and feared for a long time...and he said it was just so traumatic for him...he'll never forget his best friend...he just did not seem to be able to overcome that experience, seeing his best friend being killed in the back and he was also almost killed the same way, and what we did in the next few days, he wrote a beautiful poem...I still have this poem about his experience... and this kid has graduated now, he turned out to be a very bright kid, very helpful, he just sort of immersed himself into the life of the school...and he became a lab assistant, and it was a paid position after school, then he became a computer assistant, and any computer problem he would solve with his deep commitment to the school, and we all depended on him for all the skills he invested in it.

Several other testimonies confirmed that many students do want their stories to be heard and told. Critical to those types of disclosures, however, was the level of comfort with other students and teachers and individual ability to produce the content that captures trauma. Traumatic experiences are too painful and fresh, and too personal to be shared with the public. Teachers have an important role in understanding these messages too.

> We had a few students tell their stories because they were quite willing to share for the Remembrance day, and they did not want to be the ones to read the story after they told us, but they were very happy to share it and I am going back about 10 years ago now and we draw a map, they told us a story, we typed it up it was read, had a really profound effect on the school

> and at the end they said "Now you are going to keep that, aren't you?", and we said "Oh yes absolutely," and we packed it away for ten years and now last year I was talking to one of them and I said "So do you want your story now?", and his reply was "No, it is still too soon, but keep it, cause I 'll be back for it."

Sources of Empathy

Several teachers identified that their own immigration or refugee experiences contributed to their better understanding of the issues of refugee children. One teacher documented the profound and long term impact that war experience made on her father.

> I am a child of a refugee, and first generation Canadian. My parents went through lot of trauma during the Second World War, and they were married here, we came along very quickly afterwards, and there were jobs, and family to support and the story was stored in the back , and now that my father is retired there is so much emotion, and the stories come that are very painful to talk about but I think it's also very cleansing but there is time for it and I don't think that those people who have come through the recent trauma ....They want to block it out and it's not something that they even want to talk about .... It's like "I'll do the best I can, but now that I've got all that time on my hands now it's becoming so emotional", even to the point of being a problem, like mental health problem.

Another source of empathy lies in recollections of the teachers' own immigration experience, and barriers and problems experienced then. Teachers find that their own experiences help a lot in building rapport with their students. They find that students tend to trust them more, accept their advice and generally feel better knowing that their teachers went through such experiences and came out well. However, the language barrier seems to be so impactful on student lives, that as one of the teachers said, it was perceived as a critical issue to prove her ability to empathize with her students.

> I myself am an immigrant and a lot of times I identify with the students and they can identify with me but more than once I 've discovered whenever we get onto that type of topic and tell them, and they ask me questions, one question they always ask me "Well, Mrs... did you speak English when you came or how did you learn English?" and many of these kids when they find out that my mother tongue was English, you could see the disappointment right there and you can see their faces fall you know...I feel like I 've lost that identification with them, and because they feel, well then

you really don't know how I feel because you could speak the language, so its very, very difficult, truly, totally, to identify with them.

Multiple Roles of ESL Teachers

Bridging the Communication Gap with Parents

A number of stories provided by ESL teachers in both elementary and high school identified them as being involved with a variety of settlement duties in addition to their roles in education. The awareness of the barriers newcomer refugees face motivates teachers to engage in activities to alleviate some of the problems that affect their students' families. In most occasions, as teachers say, this is caused by the fact that refugee families live quite isolated. Sometimes it seems that their child's school is the only, or at least safest place to go, especially with a sympathetic teacher who does not mind their language problems.

> It is very difficult to come to school and ask questions, and that is why it is so important for us to be their contact person. I really encourage parents to come to school for any reason. Some teachers laugh at me, because I have a stream of usually the fathers coming in the morning looking for Ms. ..., and I really encourage that, and they bring all sorts of things, like tax forms, mail that they did not understand. Same thing was with one of the parents who got fired from their job because of misunderstanding, and said they would not listen to him. I phoned a company, and they got him back at work and even apologized because it was a simple matter of misunderstanding. I am teaching in a new school this year and I know a lady there who would have known of me and she approached me and asked where she could get her hair done. She's been here four years and she did not know where to look in a phone book, or how that is called, so she said: "Hair done, hair done"... and it was so important because her husband was having a big Christmas party at work. They have to know that you are there to help them. Also, I try to explain to teachers that often we are the only people that they speak English to. They can go many many days if they are not working especially, and they have no one else to practice their English with and they come and ask questions. My Spanish friends have told me that, you are the only Canadian person we know.

Some of the ESL teachers from elementary schools chose to visit several homes of their students. This proved to be quite successful in bridging the gap that an institution such as a school creates between families and teachers. Getting some in depth insight into

people's cultural background, previous experiences and present issues seemed easily overcome in occasions like these.

> And it is amazing if you get a chance to come to people's homes. I feel like a queen. Everybody is so excited that you are there and when you are on their territory that's when the questions come... they are more relaxed, you are sitting in their living room and out comes a video and whatever, and questions start and I learn more in a 20 minute visit than any interview when they are sitting in the school across the table and you've got a report card. I found out that unless I visit their home they do not feel comfortable talking to me. After, they would often seek out ESL teacher rather than looking for classroom teacher. That's really quite a compliment, and you should really be proud of that.

The other way of bridging the communication gap for teachers is to try to be available to the parents at times when they have opportunity to come, before or after the school. Many parents familiarized themselves with the school setting and realized that their children's teacher is available to them at those times.

> I try to be outside in the morning as they are dropping kids off rather than to be in a phone situation. Sometimes we walk to the door together, we can chat or just say hello in the morning so they get to know you on a much more informal basis.

Providing Emotional and Social Support

Close interactions, rapport and understanding allow teachers to have special status for their students. As providers of emotional support, they are perceived as trustworthy, reliable and irreplaceable once the trust is there. In some instances it feels like being a parent at school, as some teachers say.

> My role is going beyond the one of a teacher when it comes to emotional support my students are seeking for. Today when I was leaving, came typical questions: "Who is going to be here this afternoon..?" I feel like a parent rather than like a teacher....I feel like they are all, at my grade nine class, I feel like they are all my kids...and then you go home to your kids, and I am mom the whole day...It is amazing how important we are for them.

Crisis Intervention in Settlement

In many occasions, ESL teachers report, they are caught in a position to handle crisis intervention. The events that affect their students are sometimes so impactful that action is necessary. School boundaries do not stand in the way there.

> A year ago I dealt with a family whose immigration papers were mixed and they were to return to El Salvador. They then tried to get lost and they got to a Montreal border, and their three children crossed the Montreal border and the baby was upset and frostbite was setting in and they thought they can't take her with them so they returned closer to a road and they went to police station and immigration came and they were brought back to Montreal. The son, I gave him my phone number because I wanted to know when they reached El Salvador they were safe. I know that situation may not be good but I wanted to know that they were there. Well he called and he said I 'm in Montreal,. I told him to call collect he said they were detained and next day they were to go to the court in the morning and then a flight will be in the afternoon. And so I waited and following day again, I got a phone call and. Ms....we were at the court and the angels were there, they said we could stay in Canada. But in those five days they sold everything, everything was gone and then they waited to come back to Kitchener, so I started a campaign of getting household items and so on, Luckily we had a family, they were both lawyers, and able to help a lot, but in the matter of two weeks, they had gone from here to the angels.

Several elementary school teachers documented that they are organizing activities to collect clothing or sport equipment for refugee families.

> I set up a closet in our school, and teachers and others bring good used clothes and other things, and my students and parents come and bring black bag and they can get something, little things like skates, ESL teachers have responsibilities of that kind as well. We also purchase shorts and T-shirts, for them so they can feel comfortable.

In some instances teachers emphasize that the basic needs of their students and their families are not satisfied. The painful process that some of them are going through now with cuts to social benefits is documented in a sad story of parent's despair.

> A family that has been in school for many years. Mother has large number of children. Young ones are attending our school...from Somalia. They were moving and I took them over to their new school was helping them with filling out forms, and made sure that they were oriented and that

> they were being well looked after...and mother made her children go into their car and then she came over to me and she had water welling up in her eyes and she said : "I haven't taken children to their new apartment yet. It is so horrible. I can't take them there"... their house had been sold and she could not get into Ontario housing, like some of her friends...for some reason she did not have enough points, and she said "if you could call" and "I would hate to bother you, I never wanted to tell you this but...", she had nowhere to go, she was at the end. I still need follow up on that. I wish we could help them more. I almost called the office (Board) to ask them if I have the right to do all of this...

Crisis intervention also happens in high schools. According to the high school teachers, this places the unique responsibilities on them, especially if the relationship of students with their family is not good. Moreover, the issues that high school age students have require confidentiality measures to be respected so often those issues stay within teacher-student dyad. These occasions bring teachers in a position to act promptly and to the best of their ability and knowledge. A lot of doubts and uncertainties accompany these interventions.

> I had a situation with one of the students that relates to this...she shared with me her problem, and I ended up giving money to this child and because the situation demanded that...it was necessary at the time. That happened right in the last day of the school year...and she came back in September, and the situation was really awkward between us...I let it go, let it go, let it go...and decided to do something about it. The student also felt uncomfortable, we had to stop in at my house...so there she was right in my house, saw all of my life, and money and these things had to happen ...and finally when I realized that she wasn't looking at me when she saw me... Finally we talked.... I said..."You're not looking at me to say hello in the hall because I gave you money", and then she said..."I tried to make enough money in the summer to pay you back and I couldn't, and I want to so badly",...and I said...."I told you not to let this bother you, if you can ever pay me back some day that is great if you cannot you don't have to you do the same thing when you are in the similar position" and since we had that conversation we are okay, but it was awkward for a long time...and I thought...did I not handle this right, should I not have done that, should I not have given her that money...

Coping Strategies of ESL Students

The first few months spent in Canada and in the ESL class are the most traumatic for the refugee children who already had gone through a lot. Finding a way to cope with the pressures and barriers during the transitional, or settlement times is a hard and overwhelming job for young people. Overall, teachers agreed that the major strength and coping mechanism is the motivation to continue with the normal life, to catch up with where they left. From the perspective of a Canadian born teacher, unexposed to the war and refugee problems in her own life, this is the immense struggle for survival.

> I see their great motivation to live and survive. They may not do well academically or socially, but in their own way they have a great appreciation of life in many more ways than we do and a will to survive.

According to teachers, children tend to choose one of the coping styles described in the following paragraphs.

Relying on Positive Experiences from the Past

War trauma as a phenomenon encompasses multiple events, spread throughout often long periods of time. Sometimes, events that happen during the times of exile are remembered by children in a way that bring almost idyllic recollections and nostalgic feelings, reflecting on days when their lives were far more simple and less challenging than today.

> Through a child's eyes not even all refugee experiences were necessarily so bad. I was working with some Kurdish children, who really grew up in a camp in Turkey and they lived in tents and they had to cook outside and they had toilets where you put one foot here and one foot there... and this is all they had...their youngest child hardly remembers that...but what she does remember is that she had lots of friends, she was playing, it was the happy time...but her twenty year old siblings do not remember it as a happy time.
>
> I did a guided visualization of the place that we think as a safe place to be and it's actually a girls' group who have had problems with war and who are survivors. The safe place that she went to is and with tears she told me, the tears of happiness and memories of being in the camp, but it was just,

she described the incredible image of her feelings and they were so live, for her it was easier to be there than it was to be here at this time.

Seeking Support from one's own Ethnic Group

Those of the ESL students who belong to the ethnic groups that have high presence in the community have the opportunity to rely on the support of fellow students who are from the same ethnic background. During the days of transition, this group plays an important role in terms of sharing information and orientation as well as in providing social support. In high schools to be able to socialize with others may be the number one priority for most of the students.

> I see my students coping by sticking together with their own ethnic group, making some strong friendships there, with their own ethnic group, which of course has pluses and minuses.

When they talk about both the positive and the negative side of those relationships, teachers refer to the fact that these sometimes may become disruptive for the large group, which in turn may take valuable time away from language education. On the other hand, social supports of this kind are invaluable for raising the comfort level at the first stages of adjustment to a new environment.

Focusing on Academics

Once students are back in school, catching up with their generation in terms of academics may become a priority, especially for those high school students who have been away from school for a long time. However, teachers feel that by burying themselves in the books these students often rationalize anxieties related to socializing with others. Although this coping mechanism works to the teacher's advantage, they are cautious of the pitfalls it brings. Hopes for faster acquisition of language skills requires engagement in many socializing activities. Teachers see that during the early stages of learning, socializing may have greater benefits to language acquisition than any traditional way of academic learning.

> Some of them cope by studying at home like crazy, they get home to an empty apartment and because their parents are maybe working or at school at night... they study like crazy, they just throw themselves into an academic work Sometimes their studying skills are so poor that all this work is just for nothing. So we have these ones that have wonderful friendships and socializing together and then others who are kind of living in the vacuum, who are very very lonely, and it is very easy to see who is who there.

> the older they are the more devastating that prospect is... they feel cheated for the time they missed...rightly so...and often that works against them...in the sense that they want to go too fast...the faster they go, the more trouble they get into and more time they waste... and it must be hard for the social worker to be bearer of the bad news...it is often impossible, that's what we are there for, we are the ones to help them reach their diplomas, their tickets, their shortest cut we can possibly get them to...

Resistance to the New Culture

Going through acculturation shock brings additional problems for children who are still going through the grieving process. New experiences are both consciously and inadvertently compared to those from the past. Values, beliefs, and practices of the new culture are compared with those from the original one. Since in general, very few positive things are happening in their lives at the beginning, the overall opinion about the new culture often turns to be overwhelmingly negative. Attitudes, opinions, and feelings of the same kind among other family members may also strongly influence them. In addition to the challenge of hearing about their negative opinions, teachers often have to be quite insightful to realize where the real needs are, and why the student is so resentful of the new culture.

> Some of the kids are very critical of Canada, they cope with their homesickness by being very negative about their new country. ...Or perceiving everything about Canada as wrong in comparison to the way it was done in their countries. It is hard to deal with this and explain the complexity of possibly two different systems of living...

It seems that the time factor with this type of coping strategy plays an important role. While most of the teachers agreed that they hear these types of comments from their

students at the beginning, some emphasize that if the same attitude persists throughout the prolonged period of time, as well as if there is no opportunity to challenge them, the whole process of integration is jeopardized and students might end up living in isolation due to their resistance.

> ...it is manifested with this "nothing is good here, everything is bad"...and then they hit the educational system here too...and also they don't feel that they are going to be here forever either, which makes the difference from the students we had here in 80's. These people really do almost without the exception feel that they will be going home some day...

The resistance to the new culture is sometimes transferred into anger which triggers a number of behavioural problems. In return, consequences of the school system can be so hard and harmful that they diminish all possibilities for the change and a fulfilling life in the future.

> I really feel bad because of ones that are so angry and end up all being expelled, being suspended, and they don't even understand the implications of all that. I hate saying that to them, because there are so many other reasons, that we can see for all the anger and everything and yet what does the school do with somebody that's exhibiting the same behaviours as a delinquent....and that's why I really feel bad...and the way they are...that's why, it is that feeling...

One teacher documented the inability of the system and schools within it to address the issue of traumatization and to adequately respond to its implications. This is the point where according to the teachers the system fails in meeting the special needs of its students. Documentation of outcomes is strikingly similar to that of any other kind of traumatization or experience of unstable life conditions.

> My most crucial challenge is if I have a student who has been in the camps perhaps for years and years...and this student has emerged from the camp amoral, or I would say without any sense of morals, not only has his education been deprived, he has been deprived educationally, but also in every other way, and this is student who is very clever and yet I cannot really reach him. His parents have high hopes for him, his sister is a model student and this student, I don't think he'll ever get his diploma...and I bet his IQ is just sky high. What do we do with people like that, that are

> traumatized for life...that are seemingly traumatized for life, and we had several of them that are like that...
>
> There are some that will never make, never reach the goal, and we just have to accept that...it is hard...

Long-term implications of failing in the school system include not only the failure of acquiring education, but a failure with integration, leading to isolation, marginalization and ultimately a lifestyle that is in conflict with the social system at large.

> I worry about a kid like that because I have some kids like that too. But I see the kid even three, four years down the road...where is he going to fit in the Canadian society, and a lot of them have already been in trouble with the law because they find out that they are unable to find the job, because they do not have enough English even after having say four years of high school, or four to five years of ESL, and amoral... There are some who are constantly being suspended from school and I fear they will never ever have a high school diploma...I am worried what is going to happen to a person like that in this Canadian society, and in this political climate.

Coping by Withdrawing

When traumatic experiences get accompanied with a less than favourable family situation, a community that seems too strange or frightening, and lack of support from within and outside of school, some students simply withdraw and become unreachable by any of the means of communication that are available to teachers.

> Another coping mechanism is I guess, the idea of withdrawal, I particularly saw this with Latin Americans, rural Latin America, I keep thinking of that, ...with female students, but with male students as well, they just withdraw completely, they are afraid to participate... My experience is with male students since I am a male...it took years for them to start participating, sometimes, two years before they are ready to share.

"Acting Out" as a Coping Style

This phenomenon most often refers to displaying behaviours in an overt way that is socially inappropriate. The teachers described it as somewhat opposite manifestation of the same feelings as seen in withdrawal. While craving attention, support and understanding, some students reach to this method of coping. Most of the teachers felt that this is usually the sign that they need to talk to someone, but have no way of doing it.

"Acting out" at the beginning, before the language skills are fully developed, leaves teachers puzzled about how to respond since communication is barely possible in English. Again, the fact that the issues are so delicate sometimes limits any possible communication with parents and colleagues. In addition to that, teachers have a tendency not to deepen the problem to the extent that it may affect important trust building with a student.

> ...coping mechanism is acting out...in order to get attention, some of them do that or some totally withdraw, and they find it very difficult to even confide to the teacher because they are not sure if the teacher is going to call home and they are not sure how far to go with the teacher...it's difficult to establish a deep level of trust, in such a short time...everybody is a stranger...what we think we might be helping could have significant implications, culturally...

Family Supports and Stresses

Teachers recognize that far too many times students and their parents come to them with various problems in living. Those problems are certainly one of the primary barriers to integration into the new society. Specifically, war trauma and refugeeism are usually followed by a number of barriers to optimal life in the society. Some of them are: inadequate housing conditions, lack of financial resources, lack of employment, pressures from the extended family, or within-the-family struggles.

Relatives as a Source of Both Support and Stress

The teachers pointed to a unique situation with extended family supports that is common to refugee families. Privately sponsored refugees come to Canada by initiative of their relatives or friends here. Family reunification is not the primary reason for such action. Refugee families need to do anything in order to provide necessary assistance and rescue their relatives or friends from dangerous situations. Private sponsorship however assumes a long list of responsibilities on the part of a sponsor, primarily to ensure basic satisfaction of needs. However, very often those who are sponsors are struggling themselves in Canada. While pressured to help their relatives, they usually accept these

requirements convinced that they could do enough to help. However, when relatives come, new life arrangements need to be made. Often that involves situations where a large number of people need to share accommodations in order to buffer the high costs of living. The likelihood of things turning the wrong way is greater if sponsors lose jobs, suffer from unresolved problems themselves or realize that they cannot live up to their promises.

> Sometimes we assume that because they are families that they get along together and I think so many times they stick together because of very hard times they are going through, but if you think of your own family, and who you can get along with and how many of them and you can live in the same house with, then you realize that it is a very complex issue. Often they are forced to live in the same house because they took over responsibility for their relatives, and family difficulties are really starting to show then.
>
> So many times refugee communities and churches assume that people would go along together well, and also they assume, that once they separate and start living independently that they continue their relationships and support. It is often not the case. So many family issues came up where there was lying going on about each other, money problems, and people saying this or that... people here did not have any understanding of those issues. I don't see why should we make assumptions like that.

Effects of Separation

Refugee families sometimes experience separation. It is very common that because of the war situation men stay behind in the home country, either imprisoned, or drafted by the army while their families flee the country and get an opportunity to resettle in Canada. Although the process of family reunification may sometimes last somewhat shorter, by the time the family gets together in Canada, most of them would be separated on average of three to five years. By then, the time and acculturation process have impacted significantly on their lives and family practices. Family roles and responsibilities usually change by the time the husband comes, and the family is facing new adjustments, and yet another

transition. The greater the difference between the two cultures, the greater challenge a family is going to confront.

> I had a number of women who would say: for X number of years I did not know whether my husband was alive, he has now rejoined us, but, not that I wish him dead, but I find it quite impossible to live with him, because I am used to taking over as a head of a family...now he comes in, almost like an intruder...he is a foreigner, we are fighting, kids don't like that...so that kind of information is really hard for us to get, we don't always know that stuff....

Encountering changed socio-cultural values and rules including gender differences, adds to the existing pressures and stresses that a family is already going through. These stressful factors create tensions and family conflict occurs more often. As traditional cultural values and practices including patriarchy are challenged, family violence often occurs. The teachers realize that family violence is not addressed in the same way in other cultures as it is here, and see the need to learn more about how to respond to it in a most effective way.

> We are finding a high incidence of family violence in our families, and we are fairly ignorant about where they are coming from...I don't know if some things are acceptable there, and they are not here, or maybe it's just a coincidence.

> ...the man of the family used to be a provider, but very often when they come to Canada, and family allowance comes to mom here in Canada, often women...women from Central America can get jobs very quickly, there are at least two large employers here, and I know some women who go to work and their husbands can never get a job. Very often women can get jobs faster and it changes the whole family dynamics...and men are often left out, and it's a very threatening situation, for the man and for the macho culture.

Family transitions encountered in Canada, like all other transitions they have been going through, are beyond children's control and are significantly affecting their lives in a new country by creating additional stresses. Separation of parents, as well as bringing new partners into the family creates additional pressures for children, particularly adolescents.

> I definitely see that there are some students who are having a tough time at home because the parent or parents are remarried and they are living with stepparent. And they don't get along well. I have encountered this quite a lot, especially in the last year,...they don't identify with the new person in the family and it creates such a tension and its just unbelievable, some of them just cannot handle it and they are trapped, they don't have enough English to move out and live on their own,...not enough English to get a part time job, and they are trapped. Parents can be very very cruel towards these kids who do not adapt to their new spouse.

The "Canadian way" of living allows some of the adolescents to seek other solutions, such as to leave their homes, which may produce a profound sense of isolation and estrangement from their own family. The new situation demands that youngsters take responsibilities typical for adulthood. Considering the fact that they are often too new to the country, their lives are filled with number of practical life problems. In some instances they even have to take responsibility to look after their younger siblings - a role that requires extra efforts and often does not correspond to their age capabilities.

> ...some of these young boys, not lately but in the past, usually in their 17's were living alone, and really there was no family, or family was in Vancouver, or they were definitely estranged here...or being in that age and having to bear the role of head of a family, two younger brothers and sisters, situations like that, you don't know how to deal with that.

Dilemmas and Feelings of ESL Teachers

ESL teachers' roles are extended to activities that not only involve academic, or other educational elements, but also settlement work and crisis intervention. They often find themselves in a position of investing much more than other teachers into the integration of their students. These responsibilities prove to be very rewarding but require additional time, energy, and resources, as well as adequate supports.

> I guess I just feel sort of, when kids talk about those things, I feel lucky that trust is there, that is a good feeling to have and then it gets to a feeling of responsibility...like I had...what can I do, the helplessness feeling...and I had to say myself, so far it is good, but then I have to go to my colleagues...and share just so that I can deal with the emotional part

> because it becomes somewhat traumatic for you to listen and you have to take it somewhere, you cannot just be there to listen...
>
> I feel really inadequate.... I guess I also feel like I have to make sure that the next day there is no embarrassment, there is no....I just worry that they're gonna go home and now that they told their teacher they feel embarrassed...I want to make sure that I always say "hi", next day, "we had a good talk yesterday"...something that can make them feel comfortable, that it was okay.

Teachers feel that they are not supported enough by the school administration and the overall system for the type of work they are doing. On the contrary, it seems that as a group, the ESL teachers are as vulnerable as their students.

> In addition to that, I know you and I talked about this but one of our concerns is the stress on ESL teachers, not only in terms of numbers increasing all the time but the stress from the fact that you give out such an enormous amount of support. And sometimes you just come out on a week or a day and you say, I just need somebody to give me support you know and I see and hear people say I am really starting to get little bit annoyed and frustrated because I feel that I am working so hard and yet, nobody is giving me any pats on the back or recognition and I think we all need to vocalize that.

Interview participants identified that many times they have to justify their roles to the mainstream sector, and moreover that there is not enough sensitivity within the administration for the kind of work they are doing. However, some of the ESL programs, particularly in those schools that have large numbers of newcomer students, managed to get adequate recognition both within their schools, and in the community.

> Because the program in our school has been in place for almost 20 years now, I think it is so much easier for me to deal with things that you were just mentioning, so that is good, it is still ongoing battle but I see that in KCI the program is institutionalized, and still I am under the impression that you have to work ten times harder than anybody else to be considered on the same level...

In comparison to the late seventies and eighties, the situation has improved significantly, but now that the whole educational system is in jeopardy with upcoming cutbacks, the efforts and results that have been accomplished so far may easily disappear.

> I think we are doing such amazing things, I hear those stories and that just makes me feel that...you know... those directions that we really need to be in and be aware of and I also see all the heads nodding, every time they say administrative support and I think that's something I would like to try working harder on even at this time...to get administrators and teachers to understand the tremendous diversity of our roles, and tremendously different needs of the people that we are working with....

Cutbacks and changes just introduced to the local board seem to be again affecting those who are the most vulnerable in the system, and teachers fear that the ESL programs, which have always been on the brink when it comes to cuts, are going to be affected again. Lobbying for recognition of their efforts within the system and beyond it, is an integral part of the teacher's role as well.

> We put the information package for the teachers and it was what was the ESL all about, and it was just one sheet but it was at the top of what was the ESL about, because people would come in to me and say,..."It is our department?"....so anyways...we said we have a double mandate from the government, it was very well worded because it took three meetings to get the wording together, we offer credit courses, and this, this, this, this...on the bright pink paper, and it was put in every teacher's mail slot, every administrator's mail slot. I did not hear one single comment about it except one of my teachers was approached by a head who said "Oh, I see you people are wasting paper again to justify your existence"...so that is just another thing that we are dealing with...and I know this is going away from a student...but often we are not feeling supported by our colleagues, and I was furious, because I thought I was doing them a favour.

Recommendations from ESL Teachers

Fulfillment of Basic Needs

Teachers recognized that a number of refugee families are in need of support with respect to satisfying basic needs, such as quality health, nutrition and housing. With financial supports having been reduced due to the current political climate, some of the most vulnerable families are left with very few choices and a chronic lack of financial resources to obtain proper nutrition, housing, and extra medical care that is often necessary. Teachers, therefore, suggest that activities such as fundraising in schools,

solidarity action and collection of certain goods be continued on a larger scale to compensate for the loss of basic necessities.

In addition, a comment was offered by some teachers that deprivation from many diet choices in the past, sometimes affects students' eating habits. From the teachers' perspective some of their students are not eating healthy food. But children's and their parents' perspective is different. They finally feel that they can afford such food treats as chocolate or a bag of chips. As far as parents are concerned, there is so little they can afford to purchase for their children, that buying candies and chocolates seems the easiest way of compensating for the lack of nice toys or other unreachable goods. The teachers strongly felt that careful attention should be given to food shopping orientation for newcomer refugee families.

Housing is often a struggle for families who try to live independently and who, in addition to that, quite often have responsibilities to some of their distant family members.

> I am finding that the families' first need is adequate housing. I have visited the most horrific housing conditions, like when there was so cold lately, this one family...first their refrigerator hasn't worked for two weeks, they did not know that they had a right to do something about it, and then I had a meeting with their ISAP counsellor in Cambridge and we see them bundled up, of course because it was freezing, because their landlord kept the thermostat low.

Improved Communication with Families

As mentioned previously, teachers feel that improvement of communication between school and parents should be sought to ensure that there is mutual understanding, cooperation and information sharing. The suggested actions go from formal interviews with assistance from the interpreter to less formal relationship building strategies like home visits, or having open doors at certain hours during the day for parents to drop in.

Teachers also feel that they need to find avenues of learning more about their students, their cultural background, previous experiences, and finally their current settlement conditions.

> I feel we have a lot to learn, as professionals, I mean. I come to these meetings and you know I talk to as many people in the community as I can, and still I have a lot to learn, and I think that is a rule for the community, connection between someone in the community who knows and us...otherwise all we can do is to guess...it is so hard to respond, because you can never ever say you know enough.

Different forms of communication need to be explored in order to bridge the gap that exists now. Time constraints and the language barrier are the major impediments to quality communication. Some teachers have already been exploring other avenues. When she realized that there was a lack of communication and noticed parents' hesitancy to participate at the parent-teacher meetings, one high school teacher decided to organize a "parents night" and meet parents of one language group together with the presence of a co-facilitator/ISAP counsellor who facilitated discussion in both languages. The night proved to be a success, and all of the parents came out with a better understanding and better feelings about the school system, the particular school, and even got a chance to have some individual time with teachers regarding their children.

Other attempts to bridge the communication gap include enhancing chances of communication during the regular, formal meetings such as parent-teacher interviews. These occasions, however, need to be well planned and parents need to feel comfortable with interpretation arrangements if they are necessary. The very fact that an interpreter is involved puts additional pressure on parents, especially if more personal issues are to be discussed. Teachers are aware that parents should be the one to ultimately choose the best source of support in terms of language interpretation.

Improved Communication with Settlement Agencies

ESL teachers reported that they traditionally have a very good relationship with settlement counsellors who are in most instances supporting refugee families. Their communication, however, is often limited due to the time constraints of both ESL teachers and Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) counsellors. In most occasions, ISAP counsellors are contacted in the time of crisis to assist with intervention strategies. The families that are in greater need of support typically get more attention from both sides, but many of the families get very little attention altogether due to the overwhelming demands placed on both the ISAP and ESL programs.

> One of the things that I would really like to see and I don't think its possible because of the cutbacks and the fact that ISAP people are overextended, but it would be so wonderful if we could increase the communication...I think that ISAP counsellors...my impression is that they get to see the global family situation, such as parent in adult ESL classes and younger brothers and sisters, what are the concerns...it would be so terrific if not just as ESL teachers, but if principals and guidance counsellors could have access to some information of that kind, with respect of confidentiality of course, and just tighten up that kind of communication that can be more helpful at the beginning instead of taking that much longer...

Enhanced Supports from Cultural Communities

Teachers see ethnic communities as having a tremendous potential to provide unique supports to the refugee families during the initial period. In addition to that, ethnic communities are perceived by the teachers as ideal supports for those who suffered from war trauma.

> I am sure that in all these ethnic communities there are people who are more than capable of providing extra supports, but the question is why they are not visible...Because they are not given the chance to do so. You can not expect in communities as large as the Vietnamese community, or Central American community or now former Yugoslavian, you cannot expect people to donate their time and effort without being recognized by us, the institutions. We are sometimes abusing their time, expertise and knowledge by ignoring the fact that we rely so much on their good work.

> ...I see a lot of potential for the intellectuals and professional people out there... in these different ethnic groups that we could call on when our kids are running into problems this way...tutoring, bilingual, first language support,... and the way it looks now, ... you've got to be volunteer for a while...

Several teachers, however, argued that we should be cautious with respect to the supports of the ethnic communities. Quite often, caregivers in the community are not aware of differences and problems within ethnic communities. People are coming from countries that are torn apart, and often ethnic, religious and political differences continue to exist here. Counter effects are more than possible if we are ignorant of those issues.

> One thing that's dangerous is that people often live in the same building. But some of them get into uncomfortable situations, some have to move out, children overhear situations...they verbalize what they heard later in school...and they just learn the differences, certain things you hear you don't say etc. That's one thing that they have to learn, some things.... and little kids love to say everything ... some things are not appropriate and they start to divide the lines.

The same type of caution should apply when it comes to children. Since refugee experience has such a profound impact on the whole family, it is not uncommon that children perpetuate animosities that have been picked up in their homes. This is another controversial issue for the teachers since they try to respect boundaries that families want to preserve.

> We have to be cautious when we want to help children and introduce them to someone, other kid who speaks the same language, because although our intentions may be right, it happened to me that all of a sudden I realized that two kids are from families that may be from opposing sides.
>
> With Vietnamese kids it was the same thing, whether they are coming from the North or the South. I remember talking to these teenagers, they would not even speak to someone who is from the opposite side of the country and heaven forbidden if they are put in the same class together. Those are kids who even haven't been through the war, who are second generation kids but it was still important to them where they are from. So as long we know of those things, are aware of them and don't assume because they are both Vietnamese, or both from Croatia that they would get along together...we can try to be aware of them, of those situations.

School as a Centre of Community Support

School is a community setting that has significant potential for support of newcoming refugee children who suffered from war trauma. Some of the schools in the KW community have such high numbers of newcoming ESL students every year that immigrant children form the majority of the total school population. Ideally, in the teachers' opinion, schools could be linked to ethnic communities to provide coordinated supports.

> In terms of community and school, I think the school can be the most important place for refugee students and I think the school needs to be tightly linked to really strong community groups and I think we have a lot of building to do there to have teachers learn, and also what I find...thinking,... I constantly wonder how these people from different communities and cultural groups perceive me and what are they thinking of me and how much they understand about the process...and why are we doing what we are doing and I just wish if they could be right in front of me so I can explain all of that...

> ...the safest place that they can be...at KCI we approx. have a 145 students in the segregated classes and then another 100 that have left them or are second language speakers, so that environment is very uplifting, because it is very multicultural, there is no kind of one look, it is all there, rich, poor, across class, across race, everything...

The supportive role of school should primarily be focused on providing a comfortable place for learning. This is important, particularly in high schools, when transitions from one culture to the other coincide with transitions from school to work, and when important decisions and long-term career planning is taking place. For teenagers and those who passed that stage, there is a lot that they need to make up for, primarily in terms of missed schooling.

> If they can buy into education, the ones that see it just as their social place, it does not work for a long period of time for them. If they can see the value in giving themselves a time and regardless of their age if they can see past that and commit themselves that they are in this long hall...I can't see us, yes we can act as a support but in the end I think it is the best thing we can offer them, and to probably convince them to give themselves the time, through all of that, if they

> could see us sort of as always there no matter when they are ready, that helps.

Listening to what students' needs are is identified as crucial to building rapport and good relationships with students in general.

> To me there is a need for our system to be opening up...to be able to hear and to listen to the needs of the students. I'll always remember the story about a guy who was failing science and yet was quite inventive in patenting all sorts of devices...For me the priority is not to worry what their needs are but to be able to hear who they are, and then having a system respond appropriately.

For students affected by war trauma and refugee experience, it is very important that school continues to provide a safe and sympathetic environment for sharing their painful memories. Teachers agree that students should be comfortable to use any of the possible means of communicating their feelings. Different coping styles should be respected. Some of the students may choose not to talk about their experiences, so a great dose of caution and sensitivity should be in place when it comes to group activities. Individual testimonies, particularly in the written form present a good alternative avenue for releasing some of the emotional tension regarding war trauma. Provided that there is a sufficient trust in a teacher, as many of them confirm, students are most likely to use numerous writing opportunities to talk about their own war or refugee related issues.

> As a teacher I too find that the students voluntarily share their feelings and experiences. They do share a lot of very intimate and personal experiences and very traumatic experiences through journals writing, and some of these journals are heart breaking, and they just pour out everything in the journal writing ... and they know that I'm the only one reading their journals, and they get their journals back by the end of the semester and they can destroy it if they want... and I am sure a lot of them destroyed their journals...

Sharing the experience in a more open way, such as through group discussions, presentations, and in a form that reaches outside of the ESL classroom may have an amazingly positive impact in terms of providing opportunities for integration for students. At the same time, the school communities may greatly benefit, by learning about their

newcoming fellow students. In this two-way process, the student may at the same time receive recognition, acceptance and ultimately support by his/her new school community.

Some teachers find that art classes are a good opportunity for children to reflect on their feelings. It is important to know that traumatic experiences might emerge more readily in art activities than any other aspect of the program. However, a lot of children of primary school age, have a tendency to draw idyllic drawings, with scenes that glorify life, as well as imaginary characters such as princesses, castles, nice scenes, anything that can make them feel better and possibly compensate for unfortunate experiences that dominated their recent past.

> But with the art I had the opposite experience, They haven't drawn me the stuff that they want to x-out, they did the stuff to compensate for what happened to them, like castles, and princesses, they wanted to compensate for their grieving, to find the goodness in life...

Music as well seems to have soothing and pleasant impact on children.

> I would think that the music can help too. I often play music, in the background when they are doing sit work, they respond, ... or say nice...nice.

Throughout the time spent in the ESL classroom, teachers learned of many ways of handling situations when trauma caused behaviours start dominating the classroom. They learned techniques that help them in their everyday activities and at the same time allow children to express their feelings in an acceptable way. For example, they found out that activities that involve remembering home countries may actually have quite a positive impact on children. Most of the teachers agreed that, to some extent, the grieving process they have been going through may be facilitated in a positive way by remembering those good, pleasant experiences from the past.

> I encourage them to remember good things, cause not everything that happened to them was necessarily negative, when they are ready, when they are writing with you I can help them with their language, so even suggest to write it for them, and I help them with their English, and there are questions and answers, and they remember good things and you see big

> smiles, but sometimes when they read it back they cry sometimes...it works really well.
>
> Then they go to their homes and read these to their parents who are astonished that they remember this and that, and "this is how the house looked like, I almost forgot."
>
> Last year I brought in Zlata's diary (a book written by a girl in Sarajevo) and when I brought it in, for the girls and for boys too, it was almost as if that's my language....and I had another book with lots of pictures from Sarajevo, and they would say: That's the place where we used to buy pizza just on that street.

Curriculum vs. life skills. ESL teachers seem to be aware that individual coping styles and integration styles require them to develop flexibility with respect to the balance of academic and life skills themes in the ESL classroom. It seems that there is no agreement which is more important of the two, although most of the teachers suggested that a life skills oriented curriculum could provide better long-term results.

> Backing on that, less emphasis on curriculum for these children I feel really appalled by pages of work and the science tests and the other stuff so I would like to spend more time with children, learning more about them, teaching them more about us and the way of life here, almost more play interactive program, for the first year anyway until we get some basic language and then "let's step into curriculum." It must be terrible for their moms and dads wanting their 11 year old kid doing what other 11 year old ones are doing in grade 5. They should not be expected to do that.

Most of the teachers agree that general responsiveness of the teachers and their openness to the new forms and contents and expansion of curriculum are sometimes enough to provide additional supports to newcomer students who suffered from war trauma.

> I like listening to them and stuff they like to do... they want to do that, so let's do it, sometimes it was successful and other times it wasn't... but that is the place to start...just simple things...as far as social goes that is most we can do to help them...

The opposite view is illustrating how catching up to their appropriate grade level has importance for some students, primarily those who are ambitious and looking for future academic opportunities.

> On the other hand I had a girl from El Salvador in grade 5 and her biggest concern, because she was a top student in her country, her biggest concern was that she was gonna get behind, she could not speak a word of English, did not know what was going on in the class, but she wanted to stay there, taking notes and copying things down and that was her big worry, so they may be well concerned about missing that content. That's also my biggest battle at high schools that I go to, because I'm at high school that have no established ESL programs and what I find that I am doing is, unless the kids are booked into learning resource centre as a period which some of them will not accept, I have to see them over lunch periods. I have very mixed feelings about it, because they deserve their socializing time, they deserve to have friends around, but again they are academically oriented and that's a big battle.

Group participation. Additional supports include sports activities that are typically well recognized in school communities. In some instances participation in sport activities such as soccer, basketball or table tennis proved to contribute to breakthroughs in terms of building inclusive community spirits within the school setting, as well as facilitating students' integration into the school system. On a larger scale, students who cannot afford to go to clubs in town or simply do not have opportunities for that, may by participating in sport activities and events get valuable "out-of-school-like" experience.

> I can't help but think of KCI and our Sports nights, that was such an easy idea, we provided basketballs, volleyballs, and ping-pong, badminton,,, there was nothing to organizing those, and the number of students who would come to this activity and the joy they had, and it was again so easy and sometimes I think we looked for things that were so complex to break down barriers, and there are a lot of those simple things so I just, I look at that as a very healthy way of being part of the community and promoting the sense of community for them...

> With our Forest Heights program I want to do that, and response was overwhelmingly good, well over half of the kids came out, and we decided to do it once every month...they want to have their own soccer team and they want to challenge other school teams probably in the spring for the ESL soccer tournament...

Administrative and mainstream school supports. In order for the school to be supportive to the needs of its students, an organized awareness raising needs to take place on continuous basis. Classroom teachers and school administration have to be constantly informed about the issues that newcoming refugee students are facing. The ESL teachers find themselves being students' advocates on both an administrative (local board) and school level. Integration into the school system is a hard and long process, obviously quite frustrating for everybody, but primarily for the students.

> I have done this for the last two years, I found it was necessary, when there is a new teacher meeting and we have our new teacher meeting at the end of August, and I have found out that at each of those new teacher meetings I should have a little slot of time, I have a handout, and I speak on having an ESL student in your class...because some of those are brand new teachers who have never had anything to do with an ESL person, let alone have to teach one. Because up to that point I have had enough teachers running to me, "Why does so and so have to be in my class?"...so I give my little handout and point out that the mainstream mandate says that an ESL person has to have X number of integrated credits, plus so many segregated credits...and that it is everybody's responsibility to attend to an ESL student, it is not just responsibility of the ESL teacher. I also explain how many credits the kids are going to get and the important thing that a lot of them want to find out is, "Well I have got this kid in my class for the whole year, what do I do in exams, they can't even write an exam and mark"...and so on, and I explain to these teachers that it is perfectly acceptable with their department's head permission to assign the student no rank, no mark, so its possible to a grade nine student to go through PhysEd program or whatever else they do, and still have an NR.

The ESL teachers are aware that developing special attention and sensitivity to the needs of these children needs to be continued even after they have been in school for some time. Once the students are out of their ESL program they may feel unprotected and their issues may be forgotten unless there is a recognition that their past experiences may have a profound effect on their overall integration which extends throughout their schooling.

> My priority would be that classroom teachers and administrators develop more sensitivity to the situation and their needs and not just the needs and

> not just for the beginning of their being here, I'm thinking even more...for kids who have been here for several years, their English is coming along lovely, but behavioural problems and other problems are unresolved than we tend to say in schools, "well it can't be anything cultural, because they've been here all these years you know"...I think that teachers and administrators have to develop much more sensitivity on all the factors that affect kids lives and behaviours.

Efforts against racism. Some of the ESL teachers openly say that racism is still one of the most crucial challenges they are facing in the school system. Being open to communication on issues that generate it, and persistent in awareness raising efforts to eliminate it seem to be the only answers to this problem. Attitudes existing in the school setting can either support successful integration or drive their students to further segregation and isolation. Community and societal values, attitudes and beliefs are reflected in the school as much as in any other community setting. But school, unlike some other settings, has a great opportunity of promoting diversity and multicultural values. For the society that declares value in diversity, schools should be the leading anti-racism promotion stakeholders.

> Racism is alive...We should do something about it when we hear comments made by immigrants that immigrants are the cause of the situation...and we had to talk about it because kids were really hurt...the classroom full of 26 immigrants plus the teacher had to address it, and not just in an ad hoc but more in-depth way...and that requires serious work that we haven't allocated enough time to...sure there has to be a response to that...

One of the participants of the focus group interview felt disappointed that racism in the classroom was not identified by the teachers during the interview. Since this issue corresponded to the testimonies of the interviewed families, I asked her to provide me with an example of how she encountered the problem together with her students. In the form of a follow-up conversational interview, she offered the following drawing made by one of her students together with a bit of a background of how the drawing came out (Figure 20).

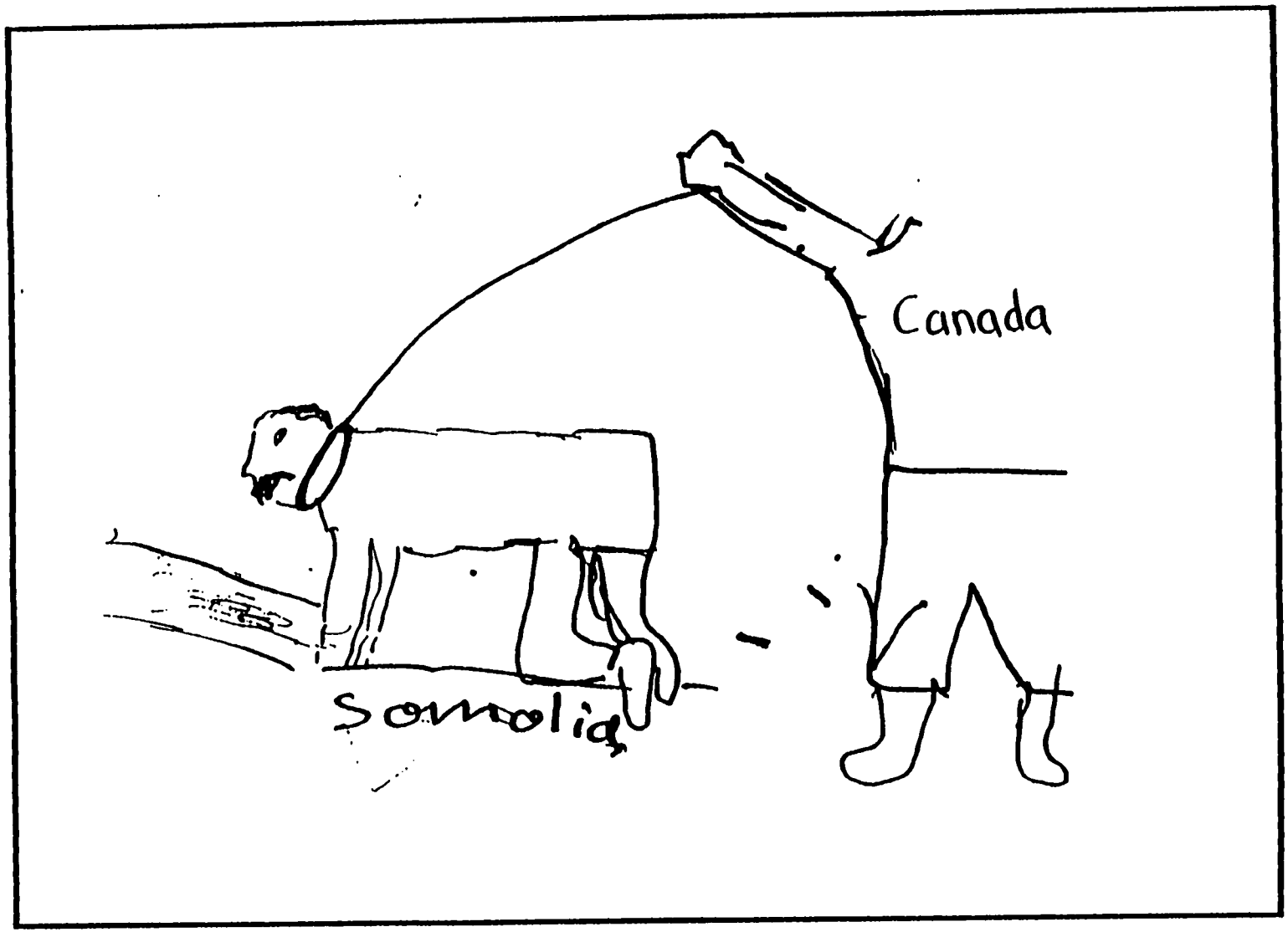

Figure 20. "Racism in Canada"

> Mohammed had been in his new school for three weeks when he drew this picture. I asked Mohammed to draw a picture about how he felt in school after he had been involved in a fight on the playground. Mohammed originally came from Somalia. He lived as a refugee in Italy and attended school there for two years. He had lived in two different cities in Canada before coming here. When I first met him, he was trying hard to fit in. Above everything else he wanted to do well in school and to make friends. After a lot of discussion with Mohammed, his classmates and his mother, I discovered that Mohammed had been bullied both on the school grounds and on the way home from school. He had been taunted, called names, teased, blamed for wrongdoing in the classroom and intentionally excluded. Mohammed shared with me that he had a great variety of feelings including: powerlessness, hurt, frustration, shame, anger and fear. He said that some of the kids at school made him feel this way. He also shared with me that he had watched the torture and murder of Mr. Aron by the Canadian armed forces and that he was scared to live in Canada. Most of the conversations occurred with an interpreter.

Other Community Supports

The community at large may provide a good basis for integration of immigrant children. Support that is coming from those individuals and organizations that represent mainstream culture can significantly decrease possibilities of segregation and isolation. Friendships of any kind and at any level are highly recommended individual activities that facilitate integration. The existence of the earlier mentioned HOST program that supports this type of activity provides a good example. While mainly focusing on befriending for adults, this program has been very successful in promoting friendship activities between the host and newcomer children in several elementary and high schools in the area.

> Community plays the crucial role, whether it is friendship among their own group or friendship with other ESL students, the ideal I think would be if they can find Canadian friends you know... someone to connect to, their Canadian counterpart...that would just be so wonderful.

> It is interesting to watch students who maintain tight friendships with their own cultural group and those that break out... and I don't say that having Canadian friends is all good, like I don't want to see them give up...they need their connections to their own group, we all do that, but it is interesting to see what types of activities lead them toward making that broader circle of friends...

The teachers feel strongly that in order to be responsive, the community needs more information and awareness building. Like in the school setting, unless more attention is given to the education on other cultures and appreciation of diversity, very little could be done in terms of accomplishing the full integration.

> ...or chess clubs....or music, ...but it is really difficult,...and a lot of it is because a lot of Canadian kids are really ignorant about these other countries and where these kids come from, and I see a big gap there... where the kids need to be educated...and I know we are working on it...with multicultural literature and so on but ...

Integration needs to be a two-way process, not exclusively dependent on the abilities and choices of the newcomers. Schools are just one of the numerous community settings that would have to allow for mutual learning opportunities. Multicultural clubs in schools do not seem to work always. But, activities based on common interests that exist across different cultures proved to be successful as a learning tool.

> We do have Multicultural Club in our school, but it is very interesting to know that these kids seldom become interested in this type of activities, they come once, and they never come back, and we thought that is not a good vehicle for integration into the school community, but what we found though is at sports we've got a very vibrant and successful soccer team at our school and last year for example almost half a soccer team was ESL kids...and they did so well, and we got a sports assembly, and then they had all the teams go out and it was wonderful to see all these ESL students on the soccer team and they were very successful and it really builds up their sense of belonging, and others get a chance to see them.

Finally, according to the teachers, the real community building comes when the formal and informal activities come together to provide quality supports. Not so widespread, but still present in the community with an exemplary success is a program that provides friendship groups within the school setting. A lot of former ESL students find it quite rewarding to act as a source of support to the newcomers in their community.

> Another thing that we did last year through the counselling office was to establish, and I think we did it twice, two years in a row, friendship

> groups, and now this year I don't think it is running and it was done through the YMCA/Host program. And it was really interesting to see so many ex ESL students showing interest and actively participating because they say they want to help new ones....it is great...we've got fabulous ex ESL students and they come in and we've got a peer tutor program going and we had ex ESL students as tutors and they ask to work in the ESL class, so it is really quite good....

Summary of the Qualitative Results

The goal of this action oriented research project was to provide the basis for and facilitate development of strategies and programs that will be based on actual life experiences of refugee children and their families living in KW community and needs and resources of the community. The qualitative part of the study focused on the two main objectives: (a) hearing about the experiences of children and their families, and (b) developing a community perspective to the issue by obtaining input from the community stakeholders.

Family and Children Interviews

The results that emerged from the data collection on the experiences of children and families have revealed that a number of common feelings and concerns connects the interviewed families inspite of their apparently different experiences of war and refugeeism. All three families nostalgically think about their past lives which are perceived as far more fulfilling than the ones they have here and now. Their testimonies of war and refugee trauma showed that the experience occurred in several stages. Initially, chaotic events of war produced disbelief and denial, but families soon turned to an immense struggle to meet basic needs. The war and refugee ordeal lasted up to three years for some of them. In Somalia, war changes were sudden and brutal, leaving no time for planning the flight. For Kurdish people in Iraq, destruction of the whole ethnic group was clearly foreseen, so our family survived several bombardments during their refugee ordeal. The story from Bosnia tells us about courage and perseverance under pressures for ethnic cleansing that lasted for over a year before it was clear that leaving was

unavoidable. The journeys that these families endured after deciding to leave brought great hopes for salvation but also created tremendous suffering and humiliation.

Throughout the time of war exposure and refugee ordeal, children suffered distress that took the shape of depressive symptoms such as feelings of helplessness, accompanied with constant crying, insecurity and irritability, nightmares, bedwetting and various somatic problems. Sudden and extremely shocking events produced convulsions, prolonged state of shock, and numerous fears among children. Experiences in transition contributed to the continuation of some of the symptoms, although most of the children proved to be very resilient and managed to overcome their initial experiences.

The new life in Canada brought peace and safety but otherwise very little. Dreams came true only in terms of satisfying most of the basic needs. The rest, and in particular needs for social support and recognition, as well as the need for meaningful employment for parents remained unmet. Children suffer from social isolation too. All of the families identified that getting adjusted to a new life is much harder since they are still mourning. Separation from extended family is one of the most significant contributors to this process, together with grieving for their lost homes and land. Fortunately, children and families from their own cultural group proved to be one of the most reliable sources of support. Other sources of strengths that allow families and their children to cope with resettlement include within-the-family supports, supports from sympathetic and sensitive teachers and peers and those provided by caring settlement service providers. Lack of language skills, and lack of support from the mainstream culture, and covert and overt racism, sometimes force children to think that they are too different to be accepted. For some children, the gap in schooling that occurred due to war produces additional struggles in Canadian schools.

The interviewed families would like to have more friends among Canadians, as well as to have their children be accepted and respected for their endurance and resilience.

They hope for more opportunities for socializing within and outside of the school for their children. Also with respect to school, they feel more should be done with anti-racism and cross-cultural sensitivity education. In order to relieve their children from the inappropriate responsibility of interpreting for them, parents wish they could have an accessible and quality interpretation when communicating with their children's teachers. In addition to that, the parents think that this community needs to know more about how wars really impact on people and the issues that affect the lives of refugees when they resettle. Finally, parents wish their numerous skills and experiences could be recognized and better utilized in Canada.

Focus Group Interviews with ESL Teachers

Two focus group interviews held with elementary and high school ESL teachers contributed to the detailed elaboration of coping strategies children use in schools, as well as illuminating roles the ESL teachers have with respect to the education of the refugee children. Beside being educators, the ESL teachers see themselves as providing settlement assistance, emotional supports, and quite often crisis intervention to their students.

Teachers identified several coping styles they see in refugee children. Most of the children rely on their positive experiences from the past and have a tendency to suppress the negative ones. In addition to that, they tend to actively seek supports from own ethnic group within the school setting. Another very frequently used coping strategy is focusing on learning, although it is sometimes accompanied with isolation from others. Displaying resistance, acting out, and finally, in some instances, withdrawal, are identified as some of the least effective strategies. The ESL teachers are working hard on trying to assist in children's integration into the school setting. Sport events, recitals, presentations and other forms of organized activities that actively include refugee children in the school's life proved to be fulfilling efforts.

Teachers are aware that family supports play one of the crucial roles in children's integration. They report that a number of challenges that families face, such as initial separation of parents and adjustment to reunification in resettlement after several years, lack of work, settlement barriers, cultural shock, and finally lack of language skills, affect their students' integration to a great extent.

Teachers also feel that some of the basic needs of refugee families are not satisfied. Therefore, they recommend that priority should be given to satisfying those, followed by provision of meaningful social supports in the community. Communication between schools and families also needs to improve. In addition to that, anti-racism education and cross-cultural dialogue are also seen as needed in order to overcome prejudices of the hosting culture. Finally, teachers felt that both their own cultural group and the community at large should play a more active role in assisting refugee families.

Community Action for Children affected by War Trauma

This section is going to provide a community perspective to the issue of refugee children affected by war trauma. This will be accomplished by documenting an action planning process and outcomes of the local community group that operates under the working title "Working Group for New Canadian Children Affected by Collective Trauma." Precisely, this section is documenting the process and outcomes of the two initial group meetings where the group focused on identification of its resources, goal setting and action planning. For the purpose of identifying priority action steps, I facilitated one of these sessions where the Nominal Group Technique was used as a tool for generation and prioritization of the action steps. This technique was suggested to the group by the steering committee at the initial meeting. The suggestion to devote one meeting to identifying and focusing on action was welcomed and supported by the group participants. It was also felt that such a step may be beneficial to the group, both by providing focus to the group's vision of actions, and to the needs and resources

assessment, which would ultimately be presented in this study. This section also briefly provides some background information, such as how the group gathered, the resources that were identified by stakeholders, and their commitment to the group's mandate.

My role in this process was twofold. First, I have been a participant of this group since its earliest stages. Second, in this, as well as in few other occasions, I acted in a consulting capacity by either suggesting or facilitating specific "task-oriented activities."

In February 1995, the program coordinator of the local Multicultural Health Coalition proposed in a joint invitation with K-W Counselling a gathering of community representatives and interested individuals in an initial meeting to explore how to assist new Canadian children who have been traumatized by experiences of war and refugeeism. A letter of introduction was distributed to the community agencies working with the newcoming population, health and social service agencies and ethnic community representatives affiliated with community programs. The goals of this initial meeting included: sharing experiences of newcomer children traumatized by war and refugeeism; identifying areas of involvement of individuals and agencies with respect to the issue; identifying skills, resources and experience existing in the community and brainstorming creative ways for sharing existing resources and working together on the development of potential responses to this problem.

Participants

At the initial meeting, participants were asked to identify the resources they are offering and to estimate the potential for their own or their agency's commitment to this initiative. Individuals who were present included:

- *a therapist/counsellor*, with training and experience in counselling individuals and families, and in particular those from immigrant communities.

- the *coordinator of the YMCA Host Program*, with a number of elementary schools contacts and extensive work experience with adult and children volunteers and befriending strategies that suit children with diverse backgrounds.
- a *teacher from the former Yugoslavia*, the current coordinator of one of the English as a Second Language programs for adults, who was particularly concerned about preschoolers and interested in development of a training for caregivers and parents.
- the *coordinator of the Multicultural Centre tutors program* and *of the ESL preschool program with St. Louis School Board*, with torture experience within her family.
- the *coordinator of the Survivors of Torture project*, involved in development of a bibliography of relevant articles and research publications on torture and related counselling interventions, currently also identifying and developing profiles of professionals who are able to help, as well as people affected and working on links with other groups addressing the same issues.
- a *refugee from El Salvador*, interested in parenting issues since parents' experiences of war and torture can affect their interaction with their children.
- *the coordinator of the Multicultural Health Coalition*, initiator and organizer of the meeting, currently involved with the project that utilizes foreign trained health professionals in training in the community and utilizing their knowledge by linking with respective ethnic communities.
- a *former preschool teacher from Central America*, now affiliated with Mennonite Central Refugee Committee, with numerous contacts with affected families, and also with personal experience of war.
- a *medical student from Bosnia*, with personal experience of war, who worked with the Ambulance Service in Croatia and women and children refugees, experienced in group therapy for psychological and physical abuse.

- *a clinical psychologist* from the former Yugoslavia with counselling experience before the war and two and a half years of own refugee experience as well as experience working with refugee women and children in refugee camp in Slovenia.
- *a play therapist* at the K-W Hospital Child and Family Services who also works for one of the women's shelters and with people with addictions.
- a *settlement counsellor*, working primarily with adults but interested in assisting children as well, and
- *a public health nurse* in Infant/Preschool Program at Community Health Department, also involved with the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), who was interested in how to link Health Department programs and resources with community needs and resources.

Issues and Concerns

As mentioned in the methods section of the thesis, the nominal group technique emerged as a tool to guide the group's intentions and facilitate identification of the priority action steps in addressing issues of children affected by war trauma. A number of ideas generated at the first meeting were used to bring people to an understanding of the multiple perspectives of the phenomena, build group dynamics and identify individual intentions and thoughts. Different perspectives allowed people to learn about each others' background, share their knowledge, and concerns. A brief presentation by a counsellor from the K-W Counselling on the "Trauma Response" in children brought participants closer to the manifested behaviours of children affected by war trauma. In response, participants generated a number of suggestions and insights that were derived from their diverse perspectives and backgrounds. Some of the those included that:

- the trauma response may not occur while in the traumatic environment, but sometimes significantly later.

- family environment is of crucial importance as family can be part of the problem as well as part of the solution.
- adults who relate to children affected by war trauma need to be educated and sensitized. Often adults have more difficulty coping with traumatic experiences than children. Children, on the other hand, are in most instances strong and resilient and want to go on with their lives.
- adults are able to develop primitive coping mechanisms; children are less likely to do the same; consequently, if children could be taught healthy coping strategies, related adults might also benefit.
- children who are "too easy" and eager to please may be affected just as seriously as children who display behavioural problems while dealing with their traumatic experiences.
- there needs to be a partnership established with professionals in schools to work with children, since many children may be craving for attention with respect to their traumatic experiences.
- alternative, non-clinical settings, strengths based approaches, and overall "normalization" needs to be the emphasis of the initiative. A focus on deficiencies may further stigmatize the children.
- a model for collective community work needs to be developed, to go beyond the barriers of a fragmented system and find integrated, holistic approaches of working with people from refugee population.
- development of a "training module" on well-being for teachers to use with people at different levels may give significant improvement in communication about trauma between the people and the care provider.
- potential work with traumatized children in Canada is significantly different from that offered in traumatic settings or refugee camps. We cannot work with children only,

since adults' problems also affect their children. Experiences from work in refugee camps show that adults were more regressive than children, but children are most vulnerable; before the war breaks out, in most families there is at least one healthy adult who would cooperate in dealing with children issues. After the war, usually, even in families with two parents, both seem to be affected to the point that their children suffer secondary traumatization.

- school settings, including English as a Second Language programs are ideal settings for providing primary help to children during the resettlement period.
- the group should brainstorm on producing and providing tools from all of us to be used by all of us (teachers, community groups, counselling agencies, day cares, churches, ethnic organizations).
- existing parenting courses may be expanded to include the unit on symptoms and strategies for coping with trauma caused by war.
- cultural issues should guide any intervention in dealing with traumatic experiences. For many cultures counselling has a strong negative connotation; in addition to that, even when there is a need and willingness, people have serious barriers to accessing professionals (financial, language, lack of information).

Focusing on Action

The Nominal Group Technique was modified to fit the needs of the group, include as many participants as possible and facilitate the generation of a wide variety of ideas. The purpose of this section is to describe the ways in which the technique was modified to fit the needs of the group.

The initial meeting served as a generator of action steps suggestions. Those suggestions were typed and distributed to the participants together with the notes from the meeting and with a request for the participants to think of other possible action steps and come prepared for the next meeting. At the next meeting, participants were informed

about the technique for prioritizing, previously mentioned action steps were reviewed and the following question was posed to the participants (Appendix D describes the entire procedure):

> *Based on the skills and resources of this group as well as the needs of refugee children as you perceive them, what concrete action steps do you see for this group? Please list as many ideas as you want.*

Suggestions generated from the group participants were put together with minimal changes in order to avoid overlap since a number of participants identified similar, almost identical suggestions. The group generated the initial list of action steps that consisted of 58 individual suggestions. After recording each suggestion, they were grouped into 10 relatively distinct categories as follows:

- Ensuring that children are not incorrectly diagnosed if undergoing assessments by variety of institutions, including schools.
- Educating and sensitizing caregivers and other stakeholders potentially involved with the issue (teachers, parents, counsellors, family physicians, pediatricians, dentists, hygienists, etc.). Local Public Health Unit may be naturally interested in taking a leadership role with respect to health professionals, as well as linking this initiative with their present involvement with other multicultural issues.
- Teaching children healthy ways of coping with war trauma. Different potential forms of direct work were added to this option, such as running support and parenting groups as well as working with children.
- Developing tools to be used within and by the community (schools, churches, clubs) when dealing with the issue of war and refugee trauma.
- Publicizing the group's actions, such as placing an advertisement to look for volunteers. An additional benefit of attracting media would be to raise awareness of the community about the issues of children affected by war trauma.

- Developing a workshop on the issue of children affected by war trauma. This option was identified to be an integral part of the two already planned events that were scheduled for the months of May and June 1995.
- Developing a resource list based on already existing resources, with a focus on trauma in children. The resource list would include professionals, non-professionals, community activists and ethnic representatives that may assist with supports to children, their families and those who are in contact with them.
- Developing links with the Toronto Centre for Victims of Torture, to learn more about the issues, and explore ways of addressing them. Finding out about other programs and services that are dealing with similar foci, was added to this option.
- Approaching service clubs who might be valuable resources to provide space, some financial or other kind of supports.
- Collaborating with both school boards on the development of curriculum to address the issue in direct work.

The discussion part of the Nominal Group-like process, allowed people to reflect, clarify, and add some of the points that were presented on the list. Spontaneously, some of the suggestions merged and became identified as concrete actions steps.

Identifying Resources

In order to link the suggestions to the resources that are available and avoid unrealistic plans considering financial constraints, the group reviewed its resources and commitment options. Most participants referred to their networking opportunities to provide links with other community programs or agencies. Others suggested concrete contributions that they could make toward ensuring the ongoing support of the group's activities. The concrete activities to which participants declared commitment included:

- acting as a liaison with the Waterloo County Board of Education, Equity Action School Coalition Group in the community and individual schools.

- providing links with adults who are willing to share their experiences of war and refugeeism with schools for example.
- acting as a liaison to the Intercultural Women's Group.
- assisting with translation services.
- providing administrative and computer support.
- collecting a bibliography of titles related to the issue to assist working groups.
- offering consultation and counselling skills.
- organizing and modeling advocacy efforts.
- facilitation of parenting groups.
- offering clinical expertise.
- organizing group events for ethnic families .
- offering membership assistance with a local recreational facility to refugee families.

Prioritizing

After the clarification took place and some of the suggestions merged, participants were asked to prioritize the given action steps. Prior to this, the group decided to set a maximum of three distinct goals. An optimum of three groups of activities was identified as a goal for the exercise. The rationale for this stemmed from the need to develop realistic, yet adequately important directions for action. Rather than eliminating some of the complementing action steps, the group focused on identifying and regrouping those to be prioritized. After assigning a value to all of the action steps, the group identified the following three action steps as priorities. The action steps then provided the basis for forming three working groups.

Awareness Raising, Community Education and Advocacy

This goal incorporated concrete actions such as educating and sensitizing caregivers (teachers, parents, counsellors) to work with school boards, health professionals and health unit on recognition of the phenomenon. This work would

naturally incorporate advocacy aimed toward avoiding incorrect diagnosis of children suffering from war trauma.

Provision of Direct Supports to Families and Children

This goal included suggestions made with respect to organizing parenting groups for diverse cultural groups. This component of action also included working toward development of the curriculum on this issue together with the representatives from the WCBE.

Preparation of the Workshop

Finally, the third identified goal was preparation work on the development of a workshop for the upcoming Survivors of Torture Conference.

In addition to these activities, the group felt that certain suggestions around promotion and possible fundraising may accompany all of the three working groups. Promotional and fundraising activities were also perceived as a possible mandate of the group at large. In addition to that, the development of a resource list, publicizing the actions and utilization of service clubs were also added as activities that may be implemented as a form of ongoing activities for the group at large.

DISCUSSION

The main focus of the discussion will be the integration of the above results by linking them to the theoretical concepts discussed in the literature review. At the beginning, however, I will revisit some of the issues that emerged for me during the work on this project. These issues include both my personal reflections as well as insights found in literature that I viewed as useful in providing a broader perspective to the phenomenon of war trauma and refugeeism.

The main part of the discussion will be theoretically grounded in the notions of ecological integration of war trauma and categorization of stress-promoting and stress-buffering forces that shape the outcome of war trauma experiences in the resettlement

context. Following this, the Recommendations section will integrate suggestions given by the research participants. The recommendations will be also provided in the context of the ecological model of intervention. It is expected that the ecological perspective may assist in achieving the cohesion of recommendations from different sources while respecting the interrelationship of several levels of intervention. This kind of model is also chosen because it reflects some of the core community psychology values, such as respect for ecological perspective, empowerment, prevention, and citizen participation.

On the Issue of Silence

In the literature review section, the phenomenon of "silence" was described as a lack of response caused by the ignorance and resentment of the host societies with respect to the collective trauma of its refugee population. Danieli (1988) introduced the concept of "silence" as a result of his insight that this is a result of refugee host cultures which are often incapable of dealing with phenomena of this kind. Also, I earlier shared my observation of KW as being one of the "silent communities" prior to initiation of the community action.

The issue of silence pertinent to the war trauma has struck me during the work on this thesis as having several complementary meanings. Initially, the silence symbolized societal silence, or silence of the host culture unready to face the horrendous experiences of people such as those of the Holocaust survivors. Due to the lack of opportunity to appropriately deal with their trauma, many individual survivors have been stigmatized, misunderstood and mistreated through revictimization. As a result, these people have been forced to bury their experiences without the opportunity to share them with their new community or with a sympathetic and understanding listener. Furthermore, the new culture where war survivors settle remains deprived of learning about their unique experiences and consequences of collective traumatization (Aron, 1988; Ochberg, 1988). This way, the host culture loses yet another chance for bridging the communication gap

with its newly settled population. The survivors' families and friends are affected as well. I feel that this type of attitude still surrounds refugees. Interestingly, this lack of interest is to a large extent perpetuated by the attitudes of human service organizations. Refugee support programs are pressured to help people start up their new lives and become self-sufficient as soon as possible. Funding for these kinds of programs typically limits the time the support can be provided. Consequently, the phase of grief is not recognized as a legitimate part of the acculturation process (Berry, 1988; Stein, 1986). Or, as Stein (1992) argues, community programs and applied research efforts are done in an ad hoc manner, and tend to stay unevaluated which creates the phenomenon of a **"lack of institutional memory."**

Working on the thesis has helped me reveal the sources of my own silence which dominated the past four years of living in Canada. I have realized that I did not answer many questions about my own experience of life in Canada, and that I had been purposely silent about my feelings while I was dealing with individual tragedies and collective stigmatization of refugees. During this time, being from the former Yugoslavia exposed me to an endless number of questions about who is to blame for the war in the Balkans. I was not always ready to answer them, knowing that I could not give simple answers to such complex questions. Instead, I have been trying to promote and advocate for the dignity of Balkan and all other nations while condemning their power-driven and unscrupulous leaders. Also, like many others from the former Yugoslavia, I had to redefine my own identity in the light of the imposed political, ethnic and religious divisions. I even felt that I abandoned my roots because I could not deal with artificial divisions and the self-centered interests of individual ethnic groups which all contributed to my cultural identity. I decided to replace my "ethnic identity" with my "cultural identity" which avoids political connotations. I was also hesitant to acknowledge my feelings about my new life here since my sources of grief differed from those of people I

supported. While reviewing the literature for this thesis project, I found a testimony that struck me as having perceptions close to my own. In it, Espin (1988) nicely reflected on this profound sense of *uprootedness* as she found herself reencountering her homeland of Cuba after 23 years of exile.

> The moment I stepped out of the hotel I knew exactly where I was, what corners to turn, what building would be waiting for me on the next block .... Cuba has been like a forbidden paradise for half of my life. Suddenly, this forbidden paradise was all around me .... Suddenly it was present, and clear, and the sky was blue, and everything was as it always was and it was always supposed to be .... But the joy in this sense of belonging was made painful by the realization that it will never again be part of my life on a continuous basis. I believe that, in the deepest sense, this is what uprootedness is all about; *that you do not fully fit or feel comfortable in your new environment and that most of the time you do not even know that you don't.* It takes an experience like my going back to Cuba to realize that what you have mistaken for comfort does not compare with what the feeling of belonging really means. (Espin, 1988, p.14)

Finally, while working with stakeholders on addressing the issue of trauma in children, I realized that silence has become a legitimate coping strategy among refugee families. I initially learned about it through the literature I read, but the interviews we held with families confirmed it as well. Many researchers observed that parents try to minimize the impact that war had on their children (Kinzie et al., 1986; Krupinski & Burrows, 1986; Peterson et al., 1991; Terr, 1983; Zivcic, 1991). Most of the authors argue that this is the direct consequence of the struggle to protect their children. Parents also do the same when trying to keep their children unaware of the events that are happening around them (Williams & Berry, 1991). However, I heard one more message from the families we interviewed. Refugee families need to trust and to feel understood when sharing their experiences. This is the crucial predicament of preserving their integrity in a new environment after the ordeal they went through (Ochberg, 1988). Due to their experiences from the past and insecurities of the present, most of them have no trust in institutionalized forms of help that the new society is offering. By minimizing or

denying a problem, they are conveying to us a desperate message not to label their children because of their experiences. They seem seriously afraid that this kind of label could do more damage than good by portending a poor future for their children. It is obvious that they did not hesitate to provide detailed descriptions of the horrors they went through, but were reluctant to say how much it really impacted on them and their children. In addition to that, they are aware that they successfully came out of those experiences. The cultural assistants shared with me that to some extent minimizing the impact is considered to be a sign of courage, successful coping, and motivation to move on with one's life from the cultural point of view. The teachers confirmed this in their perceptions as well. Only a small number of children experience serious barriers to normal living after being exposed to war trauma. To alleviate parents' concerns, we need to convey this message to them. We also need to assure them that the interventions we seek for this population are strengths-based and primarily driven by the community efforts to support their existing capacities and help them move forward.

Finally, and most importantly it is the children's silence that I would like to address. Teachers aptly depicted this phenomenon, when they realized that this is the kind of silence that waits to be broken, perhaps in the first safe opportunity, which is when they are sure they could trust. Children do not want to be silent about their experiences. They need only a little encouragement, and a lot of trust to open up and share their experiences with sympathetic listeners. I heard a number of stories of such disclosures from their teachers, and none of these seemed inappropriate because it happened in school, as opposed to a controlled, clinical setting. I think we should give teachers credit for their ability to be sympathetic listeners and supportive educators through the transitions for these children. Children's experiences unfortunately belong to life realities and we need to learn about them. But, as their listeners, we need to be prepared to handle these disclosures since they have such a profound impact on us who have no such

experience. Caregivers who are in a position to hear from children especially need to be supported and encouraged to provide warmth, understanding, and guidance when hearing children's stories, and moreover, to know how to respond and handle such disclosures themselves. The community as well needs to acknowledge the need for communication with refugee children and their families since these unique opportunities might have such a healing impact, as we heard from teachers. Rousseau (1993) rightfully points to the importance of support and guidance on the part of caregivers by saying:

> The silence, both familial and social, which a context of war or repression can generate is not without its consequences .... The impact of the unexpressed on children has been established repeatedly in clinical settings...Children who have been given no explanation of serious events affecting their family or community present more symptoms than those who have been given an explanation for what is happening to them.... (Rousseau, 1993, p.13).

Essential Conclusions Stemming from the Results

The present paper addressed three main objectives: (a) providing a brief demographic portrait of the refugee population and school children in particular; (b) hearing about the experiences of the three refugee families who came from different regions of the world; and (c) providing a community perspective to the phenomenon by addressing factors affecting the lives of refugee children and their families, and looking at the needs and resources of the KW community.

The summary of the insights obtained from the several sources: families, their children, and key informants will be discussed together for two reasons. First, the experiences of refugee families reflected in their stories speak most clearly of the ordeal they went through, so those will be revisited only in the context of the issues they generated with respect to war and refugee trauma and resettlement. Second, since many of the issues expressed by families overlap with those identified by teachers, they will be discussed together. However, any of the important themes that are identified exclusively by either one of the group of participants, will be discussed separately.

The essential learning stemming from the action planning of the local community group will be addressed in the Recommendations section.

Demographic Trends of Refugee Children in the KW Area

With respect to the first objective, it was established that the KW area hosts a considerable number of refugee children every year. Over 800 children enter the school system in this area every year after fleeing from some form of political or other collective persecution. Several schools have been identified as accommodating considerable numbers of newcomers every year, and four of them in this area are identified as registering over 100 new immigrant and refugee students every year. These data from the ESL programs of the local public board of education allowed us to see typical trends showing the average length of time required for the integration of refugee children into the mainstream school system. The average stay of immigrant and refugee children with ESL programs does not exceed 18 months. However, a certain percentage of students stay with this program for over four years. We learned that 70% of those students who stay with the program considerably longer (over 4 years) have a refugee background.

The significance of progressive language acquisition is emphasized by a number of authors dealing with refugee issues (Aronowitz, 1988; Beiser et al., 1991; Berry, 1991). As some authors point out, acquiring language proficiency is found to be in direct positive correlation with academic success, but also with improved social interactions (Charron & Ness, 1981; cited in Hicks et al., 1993; Cummins, 1986). Consequently, Cummins (1986) emphasizes that a variety of learning difficulties led by slower language acquisition may affect overall school integration of refugee children. One of the important questions for further research that could be formulated on the basis of previous observations may be to find out what are the factors contributing to slower language acquisition among newcomers. This issue in particular may be important for identifying those factors that are

affecting language acquisition among refugee children, and how they may be related to their war and refugee experiences.

The distribution of ESL students according to schools in the area indirectly suggested that immigrant and refugee children tend to live in housing arrangements in which they stay deprived of the opportunity to interact with the population at large. Although living in a segregated environment with other immigrants may temporarily be beneficial since newcomers can interact and receive support from sympathetic neighbours who went through similar experiences, its benefits soon get outweighed by disadvantages. We heard that children and adults usually soon realize that being surrounded by people who face the same challenges as they do prevents them from progressing with integration into community. Also, those authors who examined living conditions of immigrants and refugees emphasized that adequate housing plays an important role in people's overall integration into the new community (Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1988; Kramer, 1992). The authors revealed that unhealthy conditions, ones where people are living in unsafe, poorly maintained, crowded conditions surrounded with mostly unemployed or underemployed people produces hopeless and depressing attitudes about one's own prospects for the future. In terms of language, children in these segregated environments are often deprived of communicating in English and developing relationships with a greater variety of peers (Akotia, 1992; Beiser et al., 1991). It is also important to note here that while the KW area is known as generally providing safe and affordable housing for refugee families, it has been suggested that some of these families, particularly those sponsored by relatives or other non-governmental programs, live in substandard housing (Akotia, 1992; Alcalde, 1994; Kramer, 1993).

Issues Affecting Refugee Children and their Families

The data addressing the second and third objectives of the study revealed the complexity of the experiences of trauma, refugeeism, and resettlement among children and their families.

Trauma and Coping

Perhaps the most essential learning obtained from the qualitative part of the research is that refugee children and their families experience multiple stressors, starting from primary traumatization in their homelands, through refugee flight, and often continuing in resettlement. Each individual experience of the families we interviewed revealed multiple sources of stress during war and refugee exile. Primary traumatization was caused by either direct or indirect exposure to war hostilities, but the refugee ordeal itself was as much if not more traumatic than war, according to the families we interviewed. A number of traumatic events were depicted in children's and parents' testimonies which contributed to their sense of vulnerability, disorientation, loss of control, and helplessness. Children's symptoms of trauma included exceptional fearfulness, feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and grief. Drastic experiences of shelling, bombardment, or direct exposure to violence were confirmed as sources of trauma reactions.

The long-term consequences of war trauma were the result of a build up of a number of traumatic events that occurred in the children's lives. Other researchers have confirmed our findings. Nightmares, fearfulness, anxiety and worry for the future are symptoms that children tend to display as a result of the cumulative effect of their stresses. Many authors (Jansen & Shaw, Kinzie, 1994; Masser, 1992) found the same consequences of trauma in resettlement to be present for an extensive period of time after the final resettlement. However, since similar symptoms are found by authors who examined refugee children in their primary exile (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Elbedour

et al., 1993; Jansen & Shaw, 1993; Zivcic, 1993), it appears that these symptoms are common after the refugee trauma.

An interesting phenomenon was noted in reports obtained from the families of this study. Several of the children experienced reoccurrence, or intensification of the symptoms in resettlement, which parents interpreted as a result of either living in extremely stressful conditions in resettlement, or as a consequence of reencountering some of the events of the past such as through seeing scenes that resembled their own experiences. This clearly suggests that every attempt should be made by caregivers that children do not reexperience sources of trauma in their new environment, at least not in an uncontrollable way. This of course pertains only to those situations that could be deliberately avoided, such as watching and hearing about war violence, especially without parental or other caregiver's support and explanation, or participating in activities that may produce flashbacks or remind children of their past experiences.

Although examination of favourable coping styles is beyond the scope of the present research, it is worth mentioning some of the findings in the literature that lead us to a better understanding of the factors impacting on successful coping. Testimonies of the interviewed families confirmed the influence of a range of factors identified by Elbedour et al. (1993) as contributing to relative success in coping with trauma. The authors emphasize that in any attempt to determine one's coping abilities, researchers should be aware of a number of factors affecting the outcome of trauma. This statement refers to the several ecological levels, including individual (ontogenic factors, such as age and gender), family (the presence and the reaction of parental figures), and contextual factors (social support network, and culturally specific factors), all of which more or less may contribute to the final outcome of coping.

Honig (1986) summarizes several variables impacting on the coping abilities and choices of a child. Those include: (a) the stressor itself, (b) how a child perceives that

stressor, (c) the coping resources a child has, (d) the support systems available internally and externally for the child, and (e) the child's skill in making coping or adjusting responses when stressed.

The literature dealing with war trauma in children is predominantly focused on diagnostic issues and leaves little room for finding out more about what could be considered a "healthy coping style" for children affected by war trauma. However, some conclusions on what are the preferable ways of coping could be drawn from the literature dealing with children's stress coping strategies. Honig (1986) suggests that at least two coping strategies could be considered as equally preferable among children. One is *problem solving* where a child attempts to lessen the stress by dealing with the practical consequences of the stressful situation. The second is *instrumental coping* in which a child uses his or her own abilities and knowledge to make a stressful situation tolerable. In addition to that, Honig also emphasizes that teachers and parents may play an effective role as protectors by creating environments low in stress. She also adds that "community cohesiveness and strong social support networks increase child's stress resistance" (Honig, 1986, p. 32). Haan's (1982, in Honig, 1986) list of five characteristics of successful coping may be more useful for older children, adolescents and adults. He suggests that successful coping is characterized:

- flexible and inventive creation of response options.
- open consideration of options and choices.
- orientation to reality and to the future implications of situations.
- rational, conscious consideration and purposeful thinking.
- governance and control over one's disturbing negative emotions.

The ESL teachers suggested a number of coping strategies found in school age children. Those are: sharing the experience, relying on positive experiences from the past, seeking support from one's own ethnic group, focusing on academics, resistance to the

new culture, withdrawal, and acting-out. We also learned that sharing the experience with sympathetic listeners had the strongest healing impact according to teachers. For teachers, therefore, "breaking the silece" presents the most preferable, or at least the most constructive coping strategy. Parents, however, seem to emphasize "forgetting" in the form of focusing on new and positive experiences. Moreover, while they are aware that some of the experiences cannot be removed from their children's memory, parents are hopeful that positive, new experiences can help their children overcome adverse effects of trauma. This orientation toward present and future is consistent with parents' concerns that their present life circumstances, with a number of barriers to integration into the new society, do not allow either them or their children to successfully cope with their past.

The retrospective nature of the refugee stories we heard allowed us to learn how events unfolded and affected the families. However, the research methodology did not allow us to identify how certain individual variables affect children's coping abilities. Many other research projects, on the other hand, have focused solely on identifying these individual determinants of coping. Their methodologies, the cultural groups they examined, and the circumstances the examined children went through differed, so it proved to be hard to draw generalizations with respect to the preferable coping styles or individual factors mediating success in coping. Moreover, studies in this area identified literally opposing views, such as the issue of what age groups are most vulnerable to war trauma. Elbedour et al. (1993), for example, acknowledge that whereas many authors strongly argued that the younger the child, the higher the impact of trauma, others found that 8-to-12-year-olds suffered the most. One study similarly argued that girls are less likely to suffer from different psychological problems than boys (Burke, Mocia, Borus, Millstein, & Beasley, 1982).

In general, none of the children we interviewed came out of the trauma of war intact. But most of them seem to be doing well in their countries of resettlement (Kinzie,

1994; Vrij, Dragt, & Kopperlaar, 1992). Symptoms that they exhibit right after the trauma sometimes continue throughout the resettlement period. However, the notion of children's resilience appears in documented research projects, such as in those done by Kinzie (1994), Rasaenan (1988), and Ajdukovic and Ajdukovic (1993). The present research endeavor obtained similar statements from both teachers and the families. Some of the interviewed teachers even admitted that it seemed almost unreal to hear about the children's ordeals while seeing them functioning in school with no signs of such experiences.

This apparent contradiction between the experiences of extreme trauma and the remarkable resilience of children needs further explanation and clarification. An assumption could be made that the outcome of war trauma may not be overtly displayed in children. Furthermore, war trauma could be suppressed or displayed in a less visible way. It may also be hypothesized that children's resilience facilitates their relatively successful functioning in all spheres of their lives, although they have not successfully dealt with the traumatic experiences themselves. Therefore, I would suggest that the issue of resilience should not be equated with the presence or absence of trauma, since the two may not be directly, or even indirectly related. In other words, the fact that most of the children in the classroom do not show signs of trauma does not indicate that trauma did not exist or did not impact on them. On the contrary, this phenomenon may signal that these children have not yet been able to find the optimal way of communicating their concerns.

Stress-Buffering Factors

We heard from the families and key informants about some of the stress buffering factors. While living in war and refugee circumstances, successful coping meant preserving minimum resources for survival, ensuring maximum security for children, and good decision making that would lead to escape. In resettlement, most of the families try

to be good providers with the resources available to them. Those who managed to stay together during the exile and resettlement clearly see these benefits. Family cohesion and supports were reported as important in compensating for the lack of control during the exile. Cultural tradition and the values embodied in it, as well as religious beliefs, contributed to the coping as well. Also, resettlement struggles are eased with the existence of community supports (i.e., primarily from one's own ethnic group), acquisition of language, and good employment prospects for families in transition (Elbedour et al., 1993; Hicks et al., 1993; Jansen & Shaw, 1993).

The information obtained from the interviews leads to the conclusion that stress buffering factors also referred to a range of individual, family and contextual factors that contribute to the alleviation of trauma symptoms and strengthen coping strategies of refugee families and children. Some authors (Garmezy 1985; Grizenko & Fisher, 1992; Prilleltensky, 1993) refer to these factors as "protective forces." According to them, these factors have high significance in contributing to normalization of life and assisting in overcoming adverse effects of past and present experiences. While it is virtually impossible to say that any refugee family can go through an ordeal from war trauma to resettlement without facing multiple barriers and frustrations, many of them emerge from the transition successfully.

The children we interviewed have been fortunate in several ways. All of them stayed with at least one parent during the refugee ordeal; it was mentioned above that this factor is one of the most important stress-buffering forces (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1993; Elbedour et al., 1993; Jensen & Shaw, 1994; Zivcic, 1993). Also, the trauma itself for children we interviewed did not last long enough to become a chronic part of their lives. Elbedour et al., together with other researchers who investigate children who experience prolonged, intensive war trauma, conclude that such experiences have very negative effects (Hickson, 1992; Jansen & Shaw, 1993). In particular, the researchers have serious

concerns for those children who remain living in regions of the world where constant shelling, fighting, and violence progressed to the point of becoming a "normal" part of everyday living. In the case of the interviewed families, it was shown that events in their lives pertinent to war trauma took place in a relatively short period of time. However, as we will see in the following presentations, both the families and teachers who reported children's experiences emphasized that the refugee ordeal presents as traumatic an experience as war itself.

Settlement Factors Affecting the Lives of Refugee Children and their Families

Stress-inducing factors of resettlement constituted the most elaborated part of the family testimonies. Persistence of stress symptoms reported by children and families was induced primarily by lack of language skills, the social isolation of both the children and their families, as well as low economic status, as a direct consequence of unemployment or underemployment of adults. Teachers also unanimously agreed that some of the basic needs of refugee children and their families are not fully satisfied. These unmet basic needs include unfavourable housing conditions, poor nutrition, and lack of resources for appropriate clothing. Beiser et al. (1988) confirmed that unmet basic needs prevent newcomers from engaging in any of the spheres of social functioning by placing them in a position where starting their new life becomes virtually impossible. Overall, the reported difficulties in settlement can lead to a conclusion that the refugee families experience prolonged existential crisis that is induced by deprivation of their basic needs (Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1988).

It has been recognized by a number of authors (Aronowitz, 1984; Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1988, 1991), that every immigration is stressful, primarily due to acculturation process. In addition to those acculturation stresses, the resettlement stress of refugees is expanded for at least three more components. First, the families reiterated that most of the events that had been occurring in their lives went beyond their control.

Consequently, they are fully aware of the involuntariness of their migration. As one participant said,

> I did not decide to come to Canada because I liked it, or because I needed better life. I needed a place to raise my family. Now that I lost my own, it does not matter where I am. I know I will never have here what I used to have in my country.

Many authors support this evidence by stating that involuntary migration constitutes a major barrier to accepting the reality of a new life (Berry, 1988, Kinzie, 1981; Williams, 1986). Second, the refugee families strongly emphasized how lack of language skills presents the hardest and the strongest of the barriers they have to overcome. Parents reported that this is particularly frustrating for when on occasion, they have to intervene with respect to their children's difficulties in school. Several parents, for example, reported their sense of helplessness when they attempted to advocate for their children. Furthermore, lack of language skills not only prolongs successful settlement but puts refugees in a position of dependence on either agencies or individuals, or on their own children to access basic services in the community (Disman, 1988; Kramer, 1991; Prilleltensky, 1993; Rasanen, 1989).

Finally, both children and their parents expressed their profound grief with respect to the multiple losses that occurred in their lives. The grief is displayed with respect to most of the aspects of their former lives which are not adequately replaced in their present living. Two parents emphasized that grief has an even more profound effect and causes prolonged apathy if people are deprived of opportunities to express it. Authors who recognized this problem in refugees agree that people need to get over their multiple losses. They also need to mourn and express their feelings to a sympathetic listener, prior to engagement with settlement integration because until this phase is overcome, motivation for integration is often delayed (Hicks et al., 1993; Kinzie, 1981; Rousseau, 1993). This fact is clearly sending a message to the service provision sector, which is, as observed before, quite often focused on integration while neglecting the phase of grief.

Obviously strategies that allow for expression of these feelings should be encouraged among those agencies that are providing initial settlement services, as well as among educators in both regular and adult learning centres.

Lack of control, involuntariness of migration, and grief are factors affecting the settlement of refugee children as well. Moreover, in children they are enhanced by additional helplessness and lesser control over their lives (Rousseau, 1993). In addition, children of the families we interviewed indirectly suffer from their parents' lack of self-reliance. Parents clearly emphasized that their distress proves to be damaging to their relationship with their children. Furthermore, parents did not hesitate to admit that they see themselves as unable to be the good providers they were before coming to Canada. be. Ajdukovic and Ajdukovic (1993) confirm this phenomenon by saying that successful coping among children lies in direct positive relationship with their parent's ability to provide an adequate model of coping with stress. Other authors also see that initial stressors such as separation from primary caregivers, or inability of caregivers to provide supports, often continue during settlement times (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Berry, 1988; Elbedour et al., 1993, Jansen & Shaw, 1993). This was confirmed in family interviews where adults stressed that their inability as parents to provide adequate supports was directly caused by the range of adverse contextual factors affecting their lives in settlement. Stein (1986) sees long-term consequences of living in unfavourable conditions and argues that those refugees who are unemployed, and dependent on the welfare system, who have untransferrable occupational skills, who are older, or those whose traditional family roles have been altered, and those whose standard of living is notably lower than it was at home, form the high risk group in terms of experiencing mental health problems. Most of the above mentioned factors obviously impose barriers that require systemic interventions. These types of interventions are hard and in most instances impossible to accomplish. Instead of entirely focusing on removing these barriers, several

measures that address symptoms may prove to be a preferable model of intervention in these cases. Some of these would be teaching people 'healthy coping skills" (Naan, 1982, in Honig, 1988), conducting parenting classes, and facilitating stress-management or anger-management workshops.

Family Issues Pertinent to Settlement

The ESL teachers provided an insightful contribution to the emphasis on the importance of family supports and the quality of family life as one of the strongest potential stress-buffers supporting children's integration. They warned us that family issues of refugees need to be looked upon from a rather flexible and culturally sensitive perspective. This primarily refers to the issue of the lack of extended family members who in some cultures share the roles of a nuclear family. For example, Almquist and Brandell-Forsberg (1995) argue that what we may refer to as family separation has a different meaning to other cultural groups. In their study of the effects of organized violence and refugeeism on preschool-age Iranian children, most children described themselves as belonging to an extended family, and their family constructs included family members in both Sweden and Iran. The authors found that extended family members in Iran often provide primary care to children and act as a significant source of support. Consequently, the authors found that separation from those extended family members has equally significant negative effects as separation from parents. However, it is interesting to note that Iranian children in this study eagerly shared their feelings of loss with respect to their relatives, and unlike with trauma itself, seemed to cope well with the pain of separation.

The above findings show that children have sufficient capacity to deal with these feelings, provided that they are given opportunity. Classroom discussions, or even encouragement of discussions on the same issue with their family, may therefore prove to be a useful way of assisting them in overcoming pain while recognizing their cultural uniqueness.

The interviewed teachers, however, advocated for caution with respect to the benefits of the presence of extended family members during settlement. It was suggested that the presence of the extended family in unfavourable conditions of living during the initial stages of settlement may be more counterproductive than helpful since family tensions often occur due to financial restraints.

The Role of the Community

The families revealed important insights that pointed to the community aspect of their experiences in settlement. Their "messages to the community" basically captured a variety of needs for social support. We learned that refugee newcomers are prevented from full participation in the society due to a number of factors affecting their lives. Some of these factors are a sense of incompetence due to the lack of sufficient language skills, preoccupation with basic living struggles, and the host culture being ignorant and disrespectful of their needs. Berry (1988, 1991) emphasizes that for refugees, the primary stress promoting force in the social context is the hostility, intolerance, and lack of acceptance of the newcoming population and their cultures by host communities. Also, the lack of supports that are available within the settings where children live promotes stress. The children and parents whom we interviewed indicated that they need additional supports to overcome the isolation of the initial stages of settlement. Those supports included obtaining more information and orientation to the community and supports from their own ethnic community and the community at large. Again, all of the reported struggles prove to be yet another sign of social isolation that is created on the basis of contextual rather than individual responsibility.

Obviously then, attitudes and supports of the community are an important contributor to inducing or buffering adverse experiences of exile and resettlement. Upon arrival and for some time after, refugee families live in a new and culturally strange world in Canada. Although this world becomes familiar with time, the acculturation process is

much more complex. Berry's model (1988) of cultural integration offers answers with respect to changes in cultural identity and acculturation in resettlement (Berry, 1988). It is interesting to note, however, that this model has been developed based on observations of *adults'* attitudes. It may be hypothesized that for children this process is even more complex since it is obvious that their exposure to the new culture coincides with their individual development. Many authors (Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1991; Kramer, 1991) confirm that first generations of immigrants, and especially refugees, who go through a complex and barrier filled process of integration, often stay fairly close to their original cultural network. This is usually not the case with their children. The original culture obviously has a strong impact on their development, as we heard from the families and teachers we interviewed. However, those comments refer only to initial stages of resettlement. Children are more exposed to their new culture through their education, contacts with peers, and rapid acquisition of language. Consequently, children's cultural complexity is more defined by the hosting culture (Beiser et al., 1988; Berry, 1991; Disman, 1988). Sasao and Sue's (1993) definition of the concept of cultural complexity may be used as a useful guideline for understanding children's acculturation:

> The concept of cultural complexity can be defined at two levels. First, it is defined at the individual level, as the degree to which an individual is defined not only by her/his racial-ethnic-cultural category but also by his/her own affective, behavioural and cognitive representation of that social category. Second, it is conceptualized at the larger collective level of a context or setting where individual members are located or embedded. (Sasao & Sue, 1993, p.718).

It is obvious that children's cultural complexity constitutes a unique entity, that is established on the basis of their developmental, other personal characteristics, their family's cultural identity, but also reflected through the context of the settings where they live.

We also heard from teachers that inter-generational conflicts, changes in family roles, and abandonment of the original family occur often enough to suggest that children

may face multiple challenges with respect to development of a meaningful family life concept. This discrepancy between parents' and children's acculturation presents yet another source of stress for a family. If community settings do not allow for the expression of the original cultural identity, family and children in these circumstances have minimal chances of resolving the problem. Also, the community at large has minimal chances to learn about cultural diversity and understand the cultural values of others. Children who are not invited to share their original cultural values have no opportunity to test them in their new reality and may be forced to give them up when pressured by the mainstream culture. Furthermore, the hosting culture may perpetuate this situation without ever permitting other influences. This is yet another reason to emphasize how important should be the efforts to sensitize schools and other community settings where children live so that the mutual learning can take place, which ultimately brings beneficial effects to both sides.

When Berry (1988) refers to social integration of refugees, he refers to a two-way process, individual toward collective, and collective toward individual. Ideally, an attentive and responsive society may have a role in providing care and support to those who enter it from other cultures, by finding a sensitive way to make optimum use of its resources, and on the basis of the respect for diversity, offering space for open dialogue.

With respect to refugee experiences, interventions of this kind could be seen as facilitating integration in another sense. In other words, I see them as not being aimed exclusively at refugee children. Their issues are not solely their property. On the contrary, they could teach us, and they could teach their peers what it means to be exposed to war and refugee experience, which might in turn fulfill their needs for recognition. On a cultural level, another benefit could be accomplished. This highly individualist and independence oriented society may benefit from learning about societies nurturing other values, such as collectivism, group loyalty, and familial interdependence.

As Berry (1991) states, attitudes of the society contribute to people's choices of acculturation. In societies that are intolerant of diversity, assimilation and deculturation are likely to be perceived as the most favourable modes of adaptation. In hostile environments, rejection in the form of segregation and deculturation is more likely to occur than assimilation and integration. Berry also contends that the bigger the difference between the two cultures, the higher is the stress to make choices. At least two possible implications could be derived from this statement. For those refugees whose culture significantly differs from the Canadian, integration may either never happen, or it may happen only after an extensive period of time. In both situations, the implication is that for some cultural groups both the mainstream and one's own ethnic culture have to play a more active role in accommodating the transition in order to reach the optimal outcomes.

Ecological Integration of the Phenomenon of War Trauma

It is obvious that circumstantial factors prevail in the above discussions. With the exception of the individual coping styles, all other factors stem from the environment in which the individual lives. Unsuccessful coping with war and refugee trauma could, therefore, be attributed to a range of contextual pressures that start with the war situation, continue through exile, and finalize in resettlement. All of these pressures stem from people's exposure to life threatening, dangerous, abusive, unhealthy, hostile, or unsupportive environments.

The preceding results review and discussion was based on the methodology of the research which covered several layers of factors impacting on the final outcome of the traumatic experiences in refugee children. Ever since the first publications on the impact of war came out after World War II, their authors have tried to determine which conditions contribute to the prevalence of resilience to pathology among survivors of war trauma (Williams & Westermeyer, 1986). The primary focus of most of these studies (Foy, 1992, Kinzie, 1985, Ochberg, 1988; Peterson, 1991) was on individual factors.

Although the family had a place in those studies, it was as well looked upon as a unit isolated from the social context. When the shift of the focus moved toward exploring the important settings and community at large where survivors live, a new perspective began to emerge. The community standpoint, with its ecological integration orientation, only occurred in the late eighties. Consequently, the shift in focus from individual pathology to the focus on well-being of refugees in their resettlement contexts started becoming more apparent (Berry, 1988; Disman, 1988; Elbedour et al., 1993; Jansen & Shaw, 1993). Today, even those authors who stayed focused on the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder perspective to the phenomenon recognize that "PTSD is not due solely or even mainly to the trauma, but rather to processes that prevent a return to normal living" (Omer & Alon, 1994). In addition to that, chronic exposure to adverse conditions contributed to the understanding of chronic trauma response and its long-term effects on people. Chronic trauma response in this sense is caused by living in unfavourable social contexts for an extended period of time. Many authors (Berry, 1991; Disman, 1988; Elbedour et al, 1993; Prilleltensky, 1993) confirm that this occurs when families face prolonged unemployment; family life is disrupted or family roles are abandoned; cultural tradition challenged; or when the family lives in isolation, segregation or a hostile environment. In other words, contextual factors obviously have a profound effect on the lives of refugee families.

The previous discussion clearly emphasized that all layers of the context play a significant role in determining the prevalence of resilience to pathology in refugee families. Our attempts toward understanding the phenomenon of war trauma, therefore, are rather limited unless we shift the focus from diagnosing the children or adults to diagnosing the context.

To view trauma in the context of the previously discussed issues, a graphic presentation in the form of a table was used to capture the main factors contributing to the trauma response. Figure 21 outlines the continuity of traumatic events in the context

Stages of Flight and Resettlement	Stress Promoters	Stress Buffers
Stage I **War Trauma**	direct and intensive trauma; prolonged exposure; lack of safety; family separation; family disruption; deprivation of needs; lack of control over the situation; ineffective coping skills;	indirect exposure to trauma; presence of some control over the situation; tolerable life conditions; individual resilience; support of cultural tradition; community supports; family supports
Stage II **Refugee Flight**	deprivation of needs; extensive length of refugeeism; uncertainty of the outcome; lack of safety; lack of community supports; family separation or disruption	family presence and support; presence of relief agency or other assistance; control over the situation; tolerable life conditions; basic needs satisfaction; support of cultural tradition; individual resilience;
Stage III **Resettlement Decision Making**	lack of choice; lack of control;	some control in decision making;existence of other solutions
Stage IV **Resettlement**	lack of coping skills; inadequate coping skills; lack of language; social isolation; cultural isolation or marginalization; lack of information; family disruption; lack of employment; poverty; hostile community; lack of community supports; lack of ethnic supports; health concerns; prolonged time in transition;	positive community response; progressive language acquisition; presence of school supports; strong family supports; strong ethnic group supports; strong cultural tradition perception of good prospects for employment; shorter time spent in transition;

Figure 21. Continuity of Trauma: Stress-promoting and Stress-buffering Factors of War, Refugee and Resettlement Experience.

of stress-promoting and stress-buffering forces. The chronological nature of the model allows us to see how trauma occurs and continues through several stages in the lives of refugee families. Each of the individual events are handled with the balance of risk (stress-promoting) and protective (stress-buffering) forces. Most of the individual factors in the model are considered as either having stress-promoting, or stress-buffering effects on trauma and coping. However, a closer look at both sets of factors reveals that in most cases we are talking about bipolar, continuous dimensions. It is also important to say here that both factors have cumulative effects throughout time. Therefore, the final outcome of trauma experience appears to be the result of a combination of stress-promoting and stress-buffering forces that occur during all of the stages of the exile and resettlement.

Following Belsky's (1980) model of ecological integration, Elbedour et al.(1993) and Jansen and Shaw (1993) observe that coping strategies of refugee children are affected by a range of factors. According to the authors, when considering coping with war trauma, ontogenic and other child specific factors should be expanded to include micro systemic ones such as family, as well as exosystemic ones, that embody both factors from the settings children live in, and the community at large. Omer and Alon (1994) add that people also need to preserve their family, cultural, and religious roles while dealing with trauma. Social support, coping skills and preservation of roles therefore all contribute to final outcomes.

The other two important mediators of impact of war trauma refer to the factors stemming from the war situation. Duration and intensity of exposure to war may buffer or promote traumatic responses. Finally culture, that embodies cultural, religious, political and other beliefs and values (Jansen & Shaw, 1993) may act as a mediator of the outcome of war experiences. All of these factors are mentioned in the family and teachers' interviews as contributors to the perception of the influence the war and refugee experience had on children and their families. In an attempt to capture the relationship

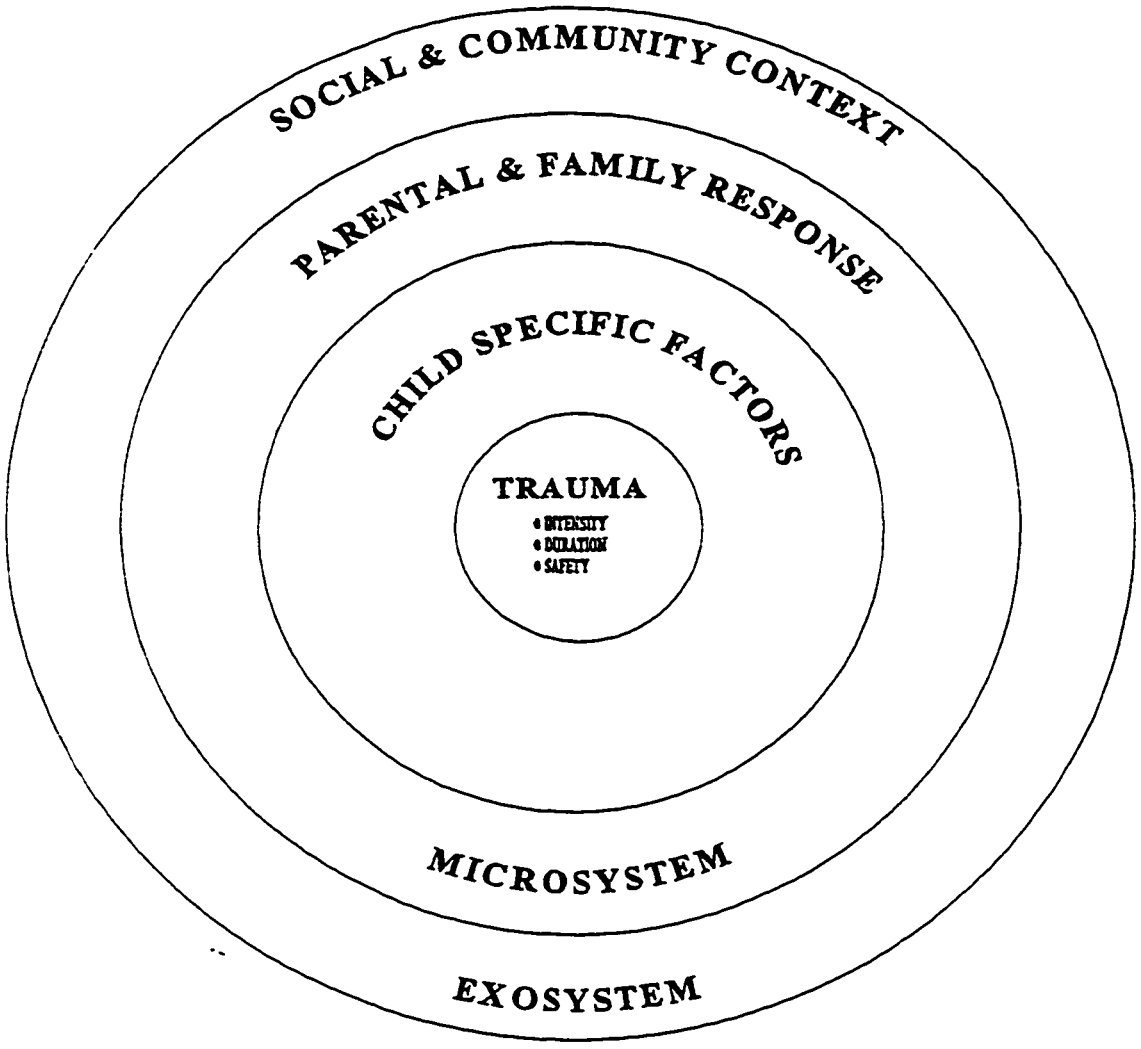

Figure 22. Ecological model of integration of the phenomenon of war. trauma. Multiple factors affecting the impact and coping among children.

between these factors and at the same time operationalize the trauma, the model represented in the Figure 22 is proposed. The model connects the four components that are derived both from the theory review, primarily findings of Elbedour et al. (1993) and Jansen and Shaw (1993), and the data obtained in the present research.

Figure 22 is aimed at complementing the Figure 21 by introducing the representation of the integration of the various levels of impact on children. As Elbedour et al. (1993) state, ecological models have concrete implications for practice, particularly in terms of providing supports for children who need some therapeutic intervention. The model considers children's health in a holistic sense, defined through their physical, emotional and social well-being. It recognizes contextual factors such as security, long-term psychological suffering, and the coping abilities of caregivers. Also, it recognizes that only a stable, supportive community may provide children with a real sense of emotional attachment and sense of continuity of care. Finally, its graphic representation of circles within circles is designed to evoke continuity.

Recommendations for Community Action

A number of suggestions for action were generated by families and key informants. Recommendations ranged from those pertinent to the activities with individual children to those at the community level that are aimed at raising awareness in the community at large and in particular with community health providers. It was documented earlier that stakeholders focused on interventions that refer to the community level rather than on the individual level. The community mobilization that occurred during this research process allowed for building a coalition of people and organizations that have a strong stake with respect to this issue. More important, the stakeholders recognized that real change will occur only if the war trauma is widely recognized in the community and solutions are sought on community levels, rather than individual level. As Jansen and Shaw (1993) point out:

> Community level interventions draw on the premise that the breakdown of social structure may be a critical factor in determining the overall impact of war trauma on children and families. Because the social structure provides the norms and context for interpreting and understanding traumatic events and circumstances, interventions at the level of these community structures may provide a highly relevant, potentially effective vehicle for intervention (Jansen & Shaw, 1993, p. 705).

Masser (1992) argues that trauma has considerable and numerous implications for children's welfare. Recognition of the phenomenon is not enough, and the psycho-social functioning of these children should be improved through multiple interventions. These interventions need to include their parents, and other caregivers, teachers, and members of the child's community. In addition, the community that comes into contact with children needs to be informed and educated. This does not refer only to settlement agencies, educators and the mental health sector, but should include a broader spectrum of community service representatives, including law enforcement officers, educators, public assistance and child abuse workers, and medical professionals.

Educational Suggestions

Community settings such as schools, where children spend a considerable amount of time, may be encouraged to get involved with prevention activities to alleviate some of the post-traumatic effects. As several teachers indicated in focus group interviews, occasional use of creative techniques to allow for expression of feelings proved to be useful tools in helping children to relieve their tensions, build stronger relationships with their teachers and peers, and gain appreciation and acceptance from the school community. Teachers also strongly advocated for providing children with an opportunity to express their past experiences in a sympathetic environment. Besides its importance to children, these expressions, according to the teachers, are also a more useful way of learning for them as educators than conducting formal interviews with children and their caregivers. Moreover, with such sensitive issues and vulnerability stemming from horrendous experiences, teachers unanimously agree that procedures such as intake

assessments or interviews are inappropriate, intrusive, and stress inducing for children and their families in particular. Teachers sent a strong message about the community supports that refugee children should be getting. The school, as one of the primary settings, should play a leadership role in providing support for school-aged children. This role should primarily cover improvement of communication with parents and those of community agencies that serve as initial settlement providers. In addition to that, the teachers would like to see the development of creative techniques to facilitate integration into the new environment.

Ready (1991) provided an interesting example of the success of a segregated school setting for Central American refugees in Washington. Although this project could be criticized for ignoring the need for integration of the students into community at large, it needs to be given credit for offering fine transitional supports for youth at risk. Together with English as a Second Language training, students were provided with a multicultural setting that advocated for respect of diverse cultural values, preserving their own cultural integrity, offered counselling with assistance of ethno-cultural counsellors, and assisted in career planning and development in the transition to adulthood.

Miller and Billings (1994) provided documentation of a primary mental health project outside of a clinical setting. The authors worked with children affected by political repression in Guatemala and Argentina. They described how a variety of expressive techniques assisted children in revealing and justifying their thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences. In short, these authors provided children with a variety of creative art techniques to help them share their feelings and thoughts about various issues in their lives. They also made sure that the children felt safe and comfortable in their environment to the extent that they could explore both positive and negative aspects of their homelands. The researchers also encouraged children to expand on their capacities for creative thinking by participating in activities such as individual and collective drawing,

group story telling and socio-drama. Particularly careful attention was given to the selection of techniques to encourage timid children's participation.

Classroom discussions on themes related to their homeland, war-related events, aftermath and grievance are suggested by Koubovi (1982) as forms of a "therapeutic teaching" in a non-therapeutic setting. A variety of teaching materials may be used for these themes, with the selection of books or themes that present meaningful contents to children of certain age groups. According to the author, these types of discussions promote intellectualization, cognitive reappraisal, and most importantly provide much needed assurance that the positive outcomes are to occur. Another advantage to these types of interventions is that they provide a therapeutic way of expressing children's feelings and thoughts. Consequently, other, possibly harmful types of expressing emotions may be avoided.

It was mentioned on several occasions before that these types of interventions constitute the most preferable way of intervening with school age children. They are also convenient since they could be easily adapted to suit regular activities happening in the classroom, and do not require additional resources. In addition to this, these activities, as documented by the teachers ideally fit to the mandate and curriculum of the ESL program where children tend to spend most of the transitional time upon placement in a new school.

Recommendations on the Community Level

The Working Group for Children Survivors of Collective Trauma served as a community representing body which contributed to prioritization of the potential action steps. The recommendations that were outlined earlier included two basic layers of interventions, one that focused around activities of institutions and grass-roots groups to promote greater understanding of the phenomenon and support children who experienced war trauma, and the other which addressed the need to provide direct supports to children

and their families. The collective effort of the group contributed to the integration of several levels of preventive interventions while providing a community perspective to the phenomenon of war trauma. It also facilitated the collaborative efforts of those care providers who felt isolated in their individual interventions. For the past year, many activities have been initiated, and the group has both expanded its number of participants as well as moved toward concrete action steps. Pressured to provide "more with less," community agencies participating in this action feel proud that they did not get discouraged by the lack of funds and a political climate unsympathetic to the needs of disadvantaged populations. Some teachers we interviewed felt that what is happening in today's neo-conservative political scene, with the emphasis on downsizing of social supports, may produce devastating effects on their students. Being already a marginal segment of population, immigrants and refugees are vulnerable to social trends where necessary financial supports are gradually withdrawn both from the programs that are directly supporting their basic needs and those that are facilitating their integration. Stakeholders are aware that every effort has to be put in place to buffer the adverse effects of decreased availability of support in the social system's network. Stakeholders also realized that many of the activities proposed on the community level may have to be implemented through collaborative efforts.

The Working Group has been involved with such a series of activities during the past year. In collaboration with another group, Survivors of Torture and Trauma, it has been working on the development of the list of resources, promotion of joint activities in the community, and planning awareness raising workshops. Over 40 agencies in the community that serve children in different capacities were contacted to provide input concerning their resources, knowledge, possible contribution and training needs with respect to children affected by war trauma. The one day conference "Our Clients, Our Neighbours, Ourselves" was organized with co-sponsorship of the Psychiatric and Mental

Health Program of Grand River Hospital. Several workshops were provided for child care workers at the English as a Second Language sites for adults. Some of the participating preschool programs already followed up and started working on improving communication with parents. Similar interventions are taking place in the Forest Hill Public School, where over 100 new refugee children register every year. These interventions are not directly addressing war trauma, but rather trying to set solid grounds for improved and trust based communication with refugee families. Being participatory driven, both projects are looking at parents' suggestions to address the needs of their children. Parents have already proven how much they appreciate that, particularly the fact that they are enabled to exercise more control over the lives of their children.

All of the participants in the present research identified that awareness raising in the community should be the priority. However, the lack of financial support for new projects represents the reality that the KW community needs to deal with at the present time, and very likely in the near future as well. Already accomplished activities prove that community development and mobilization of existing resources obviously can happen regardless of the restrictive financial climate. The other advantage to this type of community mobilization lies in the fact that it gradually involves more and more diverse settings, that in turn contribute with their resources to the stirring group. We could hypothesize here that this tactic may eventually enhance innovative capacities of the group, which would in turn open new possibilities for creative interventions.

With respect to those action steps that are aimed at providing direct support for refugee children it is necessary to emphasize that they need to encompass all of the previous considerations while considering the perplexity of the impact of war trauma, refugee exile and resettlement struggles on children and their families. De Monchy (1991) proposes that the following should be the major guidelines for intervention: acknowledgment of traumatic experiences; recognition of successful coping, surviving

and strengths; facilitation of empowerment and recovery of control over one's life. She argues that these goals be accomplished by the service provision sector through the involvement of bilingual, bicultural staff, expansion of knowledge of refugee trauma experiences, linkage with refugee communities and integration of traditional methods of healing.

The stakeholders of the KW community pointed as well to the necessity of respecting some of these guidelines while prioritizing future activities. Since these guidelines capture all of the values of the community psychology standpoint, it may be useful to incorporate them into the mandate of the groups whose activities are focusing on providing direct support to children and their families.

The full list of recommendations that emerged from the present research is provided in Figure 23. The format follows the layers of ecological integration model and suggests multiple levels of intervention. Three levels of interventions - individual, family, and community level are outlined in table format. Not all of the interventions listed have been addressed at this point, but all of them are incorporated into the mission statement of the local working group. Most of the suggestions are compatible with conclusions apparent in the research literature that was summarized in the introduction of this thesis. Others are transformed into individual action steps based on the obtained research results and suggestions given by stakeholders. The path: "goals-strategies-action steps" was developed to provide concrete steps for intended activities and to link them to the original goals.

The recommendations outlined in Figure 23 are pertinent to all of the layers of the ecological model of war trauma. On the individual level, recommendations are focused on providing primarily preventive interventions that aim at building strengths and competencies and development of healthy coping skills. Both professionals and para-professionals who are culturally sensitive may engage in facilitating activities

Issues	Goals	Strategies	Action Steps	Stakeholders according to the ecological focus
Settlement	• To provide accessible sources of supports to families and caregivers • To advocate for improved quality of life of refugee families in the KW area	• To utilize potential of professionals and non professionals from different ethnic communities in targeting various issues pertinent to refugee settlement • To bridge the gap and promote collaboration between professionals and non-professionals • To ensure supports from settlement agencies and programs to provide additional care for families affected by war and refugee trauma	• To prepare extensive list of individuals, groups and educational resources to outline existing sources of supports • To lobby with social and health service providers and policy makers that foreign trained professionals get recognition of their skills and experience in the community • To encourage continuous advocacy from the part of settlement agencies • To ensure good quality orientation and guidance to newcomers throughout initial settlement • To lobby with pre-employment support groups to prioritize and adapt job finding assistance for refugees	Community at large (Settlement agencies, employm. programs)
Healthy coping styles	• To teach children and their families healthy coping styles while respecting their cultural background	• To enhance culturally appropriate access to ethnic communities • To acknowledge and promote healthy coping styles with respect to issues of trauma and resettlement	• To utilize ethnic representatives in developing culturally appropriate techniques and tips to alleviate symptoms of trauma that could be used in various settings children and their families attend	Ethnic Communities Families and Individuals Professional/non-professionals
Individual/Family Supports	• To provide strengths-based group and individual supports for children who suffer from persistent war trauma symptoms	• To encourage families to recognize own strengths and work on improving coping skills by sharing their experiences in comfortable settings	• To lobby with clinical and community settings to organize individual and group supports such as self-help parenting and discussion groups for families, and play and art groups for children	Individuals Families (Professionals/non-professionals, ethnic/cultural groups)

Figure 23. Summary of recommendations: Multiple levels of intervention

Issues	Goals	Strategies	Action steps	Stakeholders according to the ecological focus
Trauma	• To enhance knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of war trauma • To develop tools by and for the community to increase knowledge about impact of war trauma and its relationship with resettlement • To prevent wrongful labeling and incorrect diagnosing of children affected by war trauma	• To develop links with organizations, programs, and individuals who posses greater awareness of the issue • To promote inclusion of diverse (other than clinical) perspectives to the phenomenon • To educate professionals who work with children on complexity of the phenomenon and multiple aspects of war trauma and resettlement	• To organize awareness raising workshops for caregivers and other service providers in the community • To develop bibliography of existing resources on theory and practice pertinent to war trauma • To lobby existing community groups to recognize the issue • To encourage local community health unit, teachers, parents, settlement workers and other direct support providers to participate • To publicize actions • To develop resource package on existing community supports To collect resources relevant to the historical, political, and cultural background of the newcomer refugee • To encourage educational and professional settings to utilize diverse educational resources in broadening perspectives on war trauma and resettlement • To utilize foreign trained and experienced professionals	Community at large (Professionals and non-professionals dealing with trauma and settlement)
School supports	• To support creation of a healthy, non-discriminatory school environment for refugee children • To acknowledge and encourage attentive and supportive sharing of experiences	• To lobby for anti-racism education in schools: use of non-intrusive assessment tools for students' placements; enhanced collaboration between school administrators and ethnic groups; sensitive communication with families	• To promote activities of the Equity Action School Coalition and encourage expansion of the group's agenda to include war trauma issues; • To involve classroom teachers in education on refugee children issues • To promote cultural diversity in classroom through developing appropriate teaching modules • To encourage discussion groups on grievancy themes	School Setting (Cultural representatives, teachers, students)

Figure 23. Continued.

that involve use of discussion, parenting, or self-help groups for the purpose of assisting families in dealing with the consequences of war and refugee trauma as well as adverse settlement experiences.

With respect to promoting greater understanding of the phenomenon of war trauma and its effects on the lives of refugees, the community at large needs to be reached through the activities of those professionals and non-professionals who are experienced dealing with the refugee issues. Awareness raising workshops, development of a bibliography of existing resources, lobbying, and encouraging a variety of community settings to take part in activities to promote better understanding of the phenomenon, are some of the activities that are aimed at addressing this aspect of the recommendations. In addition, advocacy should promote the utilization of the diverse skills newcoming professionals bring with them from other cultures, for the purpose of expanding perspectives with respect to the effective strategies for coping with trauma.

On the school level, activities should favour improvement of a school setting as non-discriminatory, and anti-racist environment, and encouraging the sharing of experiences among students for the purpose of learning and promoting understanding of what refugee students came through.

Finally, activities aimed at improvement of settlement factors affecting lives of refugees include utilization of collaborative activities to bridge existing gaps between those service providers who assist with settlement issues. Lobbying social and health service providers to utilize the skills of foreign trained professionals is another objective that may improve refugees' access to the services in the community.

The following is a summary of recommendations that was given to the participants of this research. The local working group is envisioned as a coordinator and repository of these activities.

- Utilization of the existing resources in the community for the purpose of organizing and providing awareness raising workshops for caregivers who are in contact with refugee families.
- Development of a bibliography of reading resources on theory and practice as well as community perspective pertinent to war trauma in children.
- Lobbying with existing community groups and organizations who deal with children to recognize the impact of the war trauma on families' and their children's lives.
- Publicizing actions related to recognition of children's experiences, such as workshops, lectures, seminars, conferences, and those community events that involve participation from refugee groups, including ones organized by local school.
- Development of a resource package on existing community supports.
- Collection of resources relevant to the historical, political and cultural background of the newcomer refugees to be used by care providers.
- Development of a list of individuals, groups, and organizations who may provide direct supports to survivors and care providers.
- Advocacy for inclusion of all teachers in education on refugee children issues, anti-racism and promotion of cultural diversity.
- Organizing workshops, lectures, seminars, and other forums on on-going education for care providers in the community on the issues related to the effects of war and refugee trauma.
- Utilizing expertise of foreign trained professionals and non-professionals who have experience assisting refugee population.
- Collecting, developing, or adapting existing, culturally appropriate techniques and tips to assist caregivers and teachers that will allow for expression of feelings and alleviate symptoms of trauma in children. Spontaneous initiatives facilitated by the ESL teachers, preschool workers and children themselves could provide the stepping stone.

- Encouraging the organizing of individual and group supports such as self-help, parenting, and discussion groups for parents as well as play and/or art-performing groups for children.
- Ensuring good quality orientation and guidance to newcomers throughout initial settlement together with continuous advocacy on the part of settlement agencies.
- Lobbying with pre-employment support groups to facilitate a job finding process for refugees.

Closing Comments

Cultural integration and the well being of the refugees who are accessing resettlement countries such as Canada is affected by many factors as we discussed before. These include individual, micro and macro systemic and the exosystemic factors. One of the biggest challenges affecting these people's lives is from the domain of societal attitudes and supports. As Levine and Levine (1970) point out, the history of mental health theories, and even more so practices, proves that they are closely connected to the prevailing political ideologies in the society. Those practices that are driven by the Social Darwinism's motto of "survival of the fittest" and consequently denial of the environmental determinants of behaviour (Levine & Levine, 1970) may have multiple negative effects to the refugees' chances of cultural integration. When dominant, conservative ideologies are inevitably forcing people to put their past behind and adapt to a new culture with very limited if any societal supports. On the other hand, political climates oriented to the left, in most instances tend to create a solid basis for understanding and support of the issues refugees and other vulnerable segments of the population are facing.

In the late 1960s and 1970s human resources in general, but social and health resources in particular, accumulated to the point that wide range of supports could have been provided to refugees, had it been allowed by the political and professional climate.

Understanding of the refugee mental health issues was profoundly affected by the individualistic views that overemphasized personal coping styles and trauma impact while neglecting environmental and settlement determinants. By ignoring the social origins and numerous contextual factors of adaptation of immigrants and refugees, the professional circles during 1960s, 1970s and even early 1980s were constantly confirming that this population is at higher risk of developing mental health problems (Aronowitz, 1984, Westermeyer, 1986). Ultimately, this orientation served the purpose of providing sufficient evidence that mental health issues of newly immigrated population were a constant burden to the health and social system (Aronowitz, 1984). It is needless to say that many of the studies used methodologies that later proved to be almost entirely futile because of ignoring the cultural context of living and communication of the immigrant population (Aronowitz, 1984).

In the1980s, although on the political level dilemmas over commitment to refugee intake remained, the health and social service sectors had managed to preserve relative independence from the political influences and focused on providing optimal care to the refugee population. Both Canada and United States started experiencing new, significantly larger waves of refugees. Those were the years of "trial and error" practices, marked with relative helplessness of the mental health sector when dealing with phenomena such as war and refugee trauma (Edwards, 1989; Williams & Westermeyer, 1989). Only in the late 1980s, did the cultural dimensions of the health and social practices became fully recognized as valid, if not crucial factors of successful intervention with the refugee population (Williams & Westermeyer, 1989).

Perhaps the most crucial change with respect to the issues of refugee newcomers to Canada occurred with its adoption of the Multicultural policy. One of the most important features of the multiculturalism lies in recognition of the ethnic and cultural diversity and changing needs of both the newcoming population and the existing society

(Beiser et al., 1988). Practically, that meant that ethnic values and tradition received formal recognition by the society. Unfortunately, it is still unclear to what extent this policy stimulated complementary practices and to what extent has it been successful in accomplishing its goals. It could be argued that after more than ten years of existence, some qualitative changes in practices could be expected to exist, but unfortunately little or no evaluation has been done in this field so far.

With tens of thousands of people including children who are survivors of war trauma, and who enter this country every year, Canada has an important task of looking at issues affecting their integration. Hypothesizing to what extent their lives have been permanently damaged is oversimplifying and worthless. Instead, a truly multicultural society needs to focus on the strengths and courage of these people while creating an atmosphere of recognition and support. After all, they are inevitably weaving the fabric of this society with their diverse and unique cultural traditions and life experiences. As a community psychologist, I also see the value of learning from these people and their experiences, particularly with respect to global issues and social change. By learning from their experiences we may get an opportunity to ask some meaningful questions that have been rarely asked in the West; such as: why is the political violence affecting the nations worldwide? whose interests are creating tensions that are devastating to these regions? and how this is linked to the globalization in world economy and emerging political and social orders? I am deeply convinced that attentive listening of this kind could give enough reason to realize that the West, by accommodating very small numbers of refugees, is in fact paying a small price for the devastation that has been imposed to war affected nations throughout the world. We also should not forget that people who end up in resettlement countries are people who proved to be lucky for being selected to do so. Millions are left in their "nowherlands" to wait for the final outcome, or to be returned to

their devastated countries to strive on minimal resources between the past and another incoming war.

This research project focused on examining the aspects of war trauma in children on the local level. Yet, I hope some generalizations could be made to extend its use to similar communities that have been experiencing a large intake of refugee population.

Finally, on a more personal note, I wish to add that this research has helped me to find some meaningful answers to my own struggle to comprehend the impact of collective trauma such as war on children. I am glad that I learned that adaptive strengths and coping skills of these people strongly dominate their lives despite the multiple barriers they have been facing. I have been witnessing their mourning, their settlement struggles, but also their victories. Their unprecedented optimism, and determination to thrive and survive has given me the answer to my own dilemma about the meaning of my decision to move to Canada. However, I wish I could give both my participants and myself a hope that our children's choices about where they want to live do not continue to be influenced by horrendous events such as war or political repression.

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Appendix A

(translated into three languages)

WLU letterhead

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear participant,

My name is Danijela Seskar-Hencic and I work with the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation program at the Cross-Cultural Services of the YMCA. I am also a final year Master's student in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. After spending over three years with the ISAP, I decided to conduct a needs assessment project with respect to new refugee children in this community. Specifically, I am interested in the special needs of war exposed children. This project's primary intention is to raise awareness among agencies and other providers in this community about the issue and hopefully to generate actions that would be of benefit to these children. The project will also be used for my Master's thesis. My thesis advisor is Dr. Steve Chris. Dr. Geoff Nelson and Dr. Mary McGeown are on my committee.

As part of this research project my colleagues from ISAP (name if applicable) and I will be conducting in-person interviews with refugee families during the month of January. The interview will consist of four major areas of questions related to the experiences of your family. I primarily want to hear about how you feel these experiences affect your settlement here and what would you like to see provided as a support to your children. The interviews will be tape recorded for the purpose of accurate collecting of the information. All tapes will be erased upon completion of the transcription process.

I would appreciate very much your participation in this project. If you choose to participate your participation will be completely voluntary. This also includes that you may refuse to respond to some questions or withdraw from participating at any time. I assure you that your answers will not be associated with your name at any time before, during or after the research is completed.

The existing Coalition for support of children who experienced war trauma will be honoured to have you as participant should you decided to get involved. We would very much appreciate if you wish to join us in our collective effort to educate people in this community about what it means to have a refugee experience. I want to thank you in advance for your time.

A summary of the study's findings will be sent to you and the rest of participants by May 1996. Please feel free to direct any questions to me. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Danijela Seskar-Hencic
M.A. Candidate, WLU

Phone:
885-3500

Dr. Steve Chris
Professor, WLU
884-1970

cultural assistant's (ISAP counsellor's) name
phone #

(translated in three languages) **Appendix B**

INFORMED CONSENT

wlu letterhead

I agree to participate in the research being conducted by Danijela Seskar-Hencic on the needs of new Canadian children who experienced war and/or refugeeism.

I understand the purpose of the interview is to find out what is needed in the K-W community to support children who have these experiences.

I understand that Danijela will ensure that all the information I/we provide will be kept confidential and will be combined with that obtained from other families so I/we will not be identified in any way.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from participating at any time, and to refuse to respond to questions that I do not want to answer.

I agree that Danijela may quote my words translated in English language in the form of quotes as long as they are not associated with my name.

Finally, I understand that Danijela will provide me with a summary of the overall results and recommendations when the research is completed (May 1996).

Signature(s)

Date:

Appendix C

FAMILY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section I

1. Early settlement experiences

- Recollection of events and behaviours upon arrival to Canada
- Feelings about starting their new life in Canada
- Was settlement assistance provided? If yes,
- What type of assistance was provided (financial, counseling, orientation...)
- Who provided it?
- How satisfied they were with it?

Examples:

1.Please tell us a bit about what was it like when your family first came to Kitchener [encourage people to talk about first few months in Canada].

1a. Did you have any assistance in your initial settlement? [if yes] Who looked after your needs then?

1b. How did you feel about starting your life in Canada?

2. Present experiences of life in Canada

- How did family come out of the initial settlement
- Perceived changes family went through in Canada
- Level of satisfaction (with explanation)
- Sources of happiness
- Sources of unhappiness

Examples:

2. What is it like for you living in Canada (KW) today?

2a. What has changed for your family since you came?
2b. Are you satisfied with your life here? Please explain.
2c. What aspects of your life in Canada make you happy?
2d. What are the aspects of life in Canada that make you unhappy?

3. Background information about decision to come to Canada

- Origins of decision to move to Canada
- Who made the decision
- Were other options involved
- History of refugee claim and qualification process with officials overseas
- Length of time spent waiting for permission for residency in Canada

Examples:

3. How did it happen that you chose to come to Canada

3a. How long did it take your family to come to Canada?
3b. Were there other options for your family?

4. The role and input of children in resettlement decision

- How did children respond to this decision?
- How did they understand the decision?
- Behaviours and feeling involved

Examples:

4.How do you think your child/ren liked the idea of coming to Canada?
4a. How do you think they understood your reasons for coming to Canada?

Section II

5-9. Refugee experience- flight from the war/persecution

- How did family manage to escape?
- Description of experiences
- Did family manage to stay together all the time?
- How did children perceive the situation?
- Recollection of children's/ behaviour, feelings, actions

Examples:

5. Can you tell me more about how your family managed to escape from the war[flexibility should be used in the description to reflect the exact circumstances people were exposed to]?

6.Was/were your child/children with you all the time?

7. Can you tell me more about how your family experienced war [or other more appropriate term, again depending on the person's background]?

8. How do you think your child perceived that situation?
9. How do you think your child came out of that?

9a. Can you recall any signs of distress, such as being upset, sad, or angry?

Section III

10-15. The impact of war/refugee experience on present lives of children

- Presence of the impact
- If impact exists, how does that look like?
- What are the actual symptoms that children exhibit?
- Does child/children talk about that?
- Do children ask questions about that?
- Contact with children's' teachers with respect to the issue
- Coping strategies and sources of relief
- Identification of preferable sources of supports

Examples:

10. Have you noticed that those past experiences affect your child now? [if so] In what way?

11. Do you talk about those experiences at home?

11a. Does/Do your child/ren talk to you about that?
11b. Does/Do your child/ren ask you questions about those experiences?

12. Have you ever talked to your child's teacher about experiences that your child had?

12a. Has anyone else, on your behalf, talked to your child's teacher about that?
12b. Has your child's teacher ever approached you with intent to talk about these issues?

13. Has your child ever complained to you about having problems like : sleeplessness, nightmares, or fears [the list could be longer if stakeholders find it neccessary]?

13a.Have you ever noticed that he/she might be upset because of previous experiences since you came here?

13b. In your opinion, what is it that has made your child/ren overcome those experiences? (suggestions could be given to provide some direction, such as school, community, friends, family, child's individual strengths)

14. Is there anything that you feel would help your child deal with war trauma?

15. Do you feel that your child needs some extra support and/or assistance to deal with past experiences? [If yes] Who do you think should be involved in this?

- school,
- friends
- relatives
- counselling agency
- ethnic or cultural group
- settlement services
- others, _____

Section IV

16. Family strengths, coping strategies and perceived role of the community

- What are the inner strengths of the family that have been helpful?
- What are the perceived sources of support in healing?
- Importance of educating others about their experience?
- perceived role of the community at large in understanding and supporting their healing
- offering information on existing community action
- feedback re. the community action

Examples:

16. Based on your experience, what are the strengths of your family that helped you cope with your past experiences?

16a. What are the ways that help your family cope with your new life in Canada?

17. Do you feel that Canadians need to know about experiences that families like yours had?

[If yes] What do you think they should know?
Who needs to know?
How do you think it is best to talk about these experiences?

Now I would like to provide you with some information on how the K-W community tries to address the issue of children traumatized by the war.

(Information will be provided with respect to the development of the group and documentation of the process. A schematic diagram of activities will be presented. Following that, participants will be asked to think whether they would like to take part in this action.

18. What are your thoughts and feelings concerning these activities?

18a. Do you feel that we are missing anything important in this action?

Please provide us with your comments and suggestions:

19. Demographic information

Example:

Before we wrap up, could you tell us more about your family?

- When did you come to Canada?
- Did you all come together?
- Is any other member of the family still away?
- Have you or your children had any medical problems that are directly related to your refugee ordeal?
- How old is/are your children?
- Do you mind telling me your age?
- Do you work now?
- Do you attend English school?

Thank you again for your cooperation. Your input has been invaluable for us. We hope that you will consider joining us in our efforts to address concerns of children who survived war trauma.

CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adolescent children may be encouraged to participate with the rest of the family if feeling comfortable. In addition, younger ones could be asked to draw a picture of the life in their home country, before and after the war experience, and/or a picture of their present life in Canada.

Questions:

- Can you tell us a bit about your life before coming to Canada?
- Can you describe some of your experiences after the war (problems) started in you home country?
- How do you feel about those experiences when you think about them today?
- Do you think other people here in Canada have to learn about experiences that children like you had in other parts of the world?
- If yes, How should we teach them about those things?
- Do you like being here in Canada?
- How do you feel here?
- What is it that you like here?
- What is it that you do not like?
    - What is helping you to adjust to your new life in Canada? (Suggestions will be given to facilitate generation of ideas, such as: you own strengths, your family, friends, relatives, school, teachers, community...).

What is it that you want to see for yourself and other children in Canada to help you

overcome those bad experiences?

Appendix D

Outline of the Nominal Group Technique used with the Working Group for New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma

PARTICIPANTS: Working Group for the New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma.

SIZE OF THE GROUP: 13 participants

PHASES:

I. INTRODUCTION AND SET-UP

a. Introduction of the participants (people share their background and experience with the issue, and who they represent, if appropriate)
b. Introduction of the method
c. Introducing and explaining the question

Question:

Based on the skills and resources of this group as well as the needs of refugee children as you perceive them, what concrete action steps do you see for this group? Please list as many ideas as you want.

II. IDEA GENERATION

Participants list all of the ideas they have without interacting with others.

III. IDEA SHARING

Each participant identifies one action step they have on their own list. After everyone shares the first suggestion, the second round takes place and so on, until all of the ideas are exhausted.

IV. DISCUSSION

Participants engage in elaborating and clarification of the ideas that were suggested. Changing, combining, replacing, or adding ideas takes place.

V. PRIORITIZING

Participants mark 3 ideas that are the most important action steps for them.

VI. CLARIFICATION AND SUMMARIZING

After the "votes" are tallied, group is presented with the ranking. Again, discussion takes place to further clarify the outcome. Attempt is then made toward possible conceptualization of the individual goals that correspond to the resources identified in the initial session.

Appendix E

Outline of the Focus Group Interview with English as a Second Language Teachers

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS:

1. How long have you worked as an ESL teacher?

2. Who are the students that you have thought so far as an ESL teacher? Please tell us a bit about their:

a. age;
b. ethnic origin;
c. how many have you been seeing every year;
d. are they mostly immigrants or refugees?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS:

1. I would like to hear from you about your experiences with refugee children:

1a. From the basis of your experience, how do you think most of your refugee students cope with their everyday life in Canada?

1b. Have you ever experienced situations when these students expressed hard times coping with their past or present life? Please tell me more about it.

2. How would you compare the needs of the refugee children to those of the immigrant children? Do you think that these children have needs that are significantly different from those of immigrant children. If yes, how? What are the special needs you see these students have?

2a. Describe how these needs are being met? In your opinion, have these needs been met?
If yes, how?
If no, Why not?

3. Describe your work with refugee children.

3a. In what ways, other than school curriculum, do you assist your students during the transition process?

3b. What are the challenging aspects of work with refugee children? What are the rewarding aspects of work with these students?

3c. Describe the factors that you find contributing the most to the successfulness of their integration.

If generation of ideas fails, individual categories are offered: a. their previous experiences, b. their family situation, c. their individual characteristics, d. their present living conditions, e. whether they are connected with own ethnic organization, f. whether and how they are connected to the rest of the community), g. their school achievement (primarily how quickly they learn English and integrate into the mainstream school system).

4. Do you get a chance to hear from these children about how they got to Canada, what happened to them before, how they feel about it etc.

5. What would you like to see happening in the school and outside of it to better serve needs of the refugee children?

It is time to wrap up this conversation. I want to thank you again for sharing your time and energy with me tonight. Before we finish, I would like to inform you of some of the activities in this community that work towards addressing issues of refugee children.
Overview of the activities of the Multicultural Health Coalition, Working Group for New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma, Equity Action school Coalition.

Appendix F

OUTLINE FOR THE TRAINING SESSION FOR CULTURAL ASSISTANTS

1. Brief overview of the research
- Discussion about the research proposal that assistants previously had read.
- Questions and Answers about the research

2. Discussion about the role of the interviewer

- Advantages and disadvantages of being the part of the same culture
- Basic principles of interviewing
- possible difficulties
- risks and benefits
- tape recording of the interviews
- transcribing interviews

3. Review of the ethical guidelines in research and interviewing

4. Questions
- Discussion,
- feedback and revision of questions to suit needs and characteristics of particular ethnic group.

5. Information sharing on community development efforts complementing the research
- Schematic diagram of activities will be provided for the interviews.

6. Integrating interview with settlement issues. Discussion on how to try to respond to issues that emerge during the interview and how to switch from interview back to the role of ISAP counsellor, if needed.

(translated into three languages) **Appendix G**

WLU letterhead

CONSENT TO CHILD'S PARTICIPATION

I as a parent of _____ allow him/her to participate in the research conducted by Danijela Seskar-Hencic, ISAP counsellor and M.A. candidate from the Wilfrid Laurier University.

I understand that the purpose of the interview is to find out what is needed in K-W community to support children who have experienced war and persecution that led to refugeeism.

I understand that Danijela will ensure that all the information my child provides will be kept confidential and will be combined with that obtained from other children so he/she will not be identified in any way.

I understand that my child's participation is completely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw him/her from participation at any time, that he/she does not have to answer any question if he/she does not want to, without any penalty on him/her.

I also understand that if my child agrees to participate in interview, it will be tape recorded for the purpose of collecting the accurate and complete information. All tapes will be erased as soon as the transcription process is done. All of the written materials will also be destroyed in case my child agrees to provide Danijela with his/her written insights.

I understand that Danijela will provide us with the summary of the overall results and recommendations when the research is completed. This will occur in May 1996.

Signature(s)

Date:

Appendix H

Waterloo County Board of Education
ESL/ESD registrations, 1993-1995

	1993	1994	1995
AR KAUFMAN	57	63	104
ALISON PARK	14	13	15
ALPINE	7	16	19
AVENUE ROAD	26	17	37
AYR	0	0	0
BADEN	0	0	0
BLAIR ROAD	4	4	6
BRESLAU	0	0	0
BRIDGEPORT	9	6	4
BRIGADOON	4	2	4
BRIGHTON	11	17	11
C. CORNWELL	0	0	0
CEDARBREA	50	40	53
CENTENNIAL (C)	1	0	4
CENTENNIAL (W)	10	13	25
CENTRAL	4	4	4
CHALMERS	20	26	39
CLEMENS MILL	47	58	48
CONESTOGO	0	1	2
CORONATION	44	45	48
COUNTERY HILLS	10	8	22
COURTLAND	25	26	23
CRESTVIEW	61	79	99
DICKIE SETTLEMENT	0	0	0
DICKSON	2	1	3
DOON	0	4	5
DRIFTWOOD	6	4	10
ELGIN STREET	0	0	44
ELIZ. ZIEGLER	9	11	9
EMPIRE	2	7	3
FLORADALE	7	12	13
FOREST GLEN	0	1	0
FOREST HILL	62	91	115
FRANKLIN	1	2	0
GLENCAIRN	2	1	5
GRANDVIEW (C)	11	10	15
GRANDVIEW (H)	0	1	0
HAROLD WAG.	8	9	10
HEIDELBERG	3	4	3
HESPELER	0	5	3
HIGHLAND	20	24	19
HILLCREST	0	0	0
HOWARD ROB.	57	68	81

J. F. CARMICHAEL	36	44	93
JOHN DARLING	1	2	1
JOHN MAHOOD	0	2	5
KEATSWAY	27	40	29
KING EDWARD	61	50	71
LAURENTIAN	16	21	28
LEXINGTON	23	29	44
LINCOLN AVE.	17	18	18
LINCOLN HTS.	12	9	12
LINWOOD	51	80	100
LITTLE'S CR.	1	1	0
MACGREGOR	24	16	21
MACKENZIE KG.	2	4	7
MANCHESTER	15	21	41
MARGARET AVE.	9	22	22
MARY JOHNSON	15	20	20
MEADOWLANE	18	15	21
N.A.MACHEACHN	5	4	7
NEW DUNDEE	0	0	1
NORTH WILLMOT	0	0	0
NORTHDALE	44	47	54
PARK MANOR	0	0	0
PARKWAY	6	2	17
PIONEER PARK	5	5	10
PRESTON	0	0	0
PRUETER	7	6	7
QN. ELIZABETH	28	26	23
QUEENSMOUNT	20	14	17
RIVERSIDE	0	4	6
ROCKWAY	29	27	36
ROSEMOUNT	0	0	0
RYERSON	2	0	0
SANDOWNE	3	11	23
SHEPPARD	2	9	10
SILVERHEIGHTS	2	2	0
SMITHSON	2	2	3
SOUTHRIDGE	57	63	72
ST.ANDREW'S	10	11	15
ST.JACOB'S	9	10	9
STANLEY PARK	19	16	21
STEWART AVE.	1	0	7
SUDDABY	27	33	44
SUNNYSIDE	0	4	22
TAIL ST.	1	4	5
THREE BRIDGES	0	0	7
TRILLIUM	17	6	15
WELLESLEY	20	20	29
WESTHEIGHTS	4	4	1
WESTMOUNT	39	48	70
WESTVALE	11	12	21

WILMOT SENIOR	0	0	1
WILSON AVE.	28	37	56
WINSTON CH.	32	35	45
WINTER BOURN	0	1	1
WM.G.DAVIS	7	8	4
WOODLAND PK.	0	3	3

Waterloo County Board of Education
ESL/ESD registrations, 1993-1995
Schools with over 40 ESL students registered per year

	1993	1994	1995
FOREST HILL	62	91	115
AR KAUFMAN	57	63	104
LINWOOD	51	80	100
CRESTVIEW	61	79	99
J. F. CARMICHAEL	36	44	93
HOWARD ROB.	57	68	81
SOUTHRIDGE	57	63	72
KING EDWARD	61	50	71
WESTMOUNT	39	48	70
WILSON AVE.	28	37	56
NORTHDALE	44	47	54
CEDARBREA	50	40	53
CLEMENS MILL	47	58	48
CORONATION	44	45	48
WINSTON CH.	32	35	45
ELGIN STREET	0	0	44
LEXINGTON	23	29	44
SUDDABY	27	33	44
MANCHESTER	15	21	41

Appendix I

FEEDBACK TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (FAMILIES)

Logo

May 15, 1996

Dear family _____:

Several months have past since you talked with_____about your experiences of war, refugeeism and life in Canada. As I promised then, I am providing you with the preliminary results based on your input. In addition to yours, two other families were interviewed as well. The summary that I am enclosing consists also of contributions made by the English as a Second Language teachers and input provided by the local working group that is actively addressing issues of refugee children. I would like to emphasize once more that the working group and I personally, would be delighted to have your further involvement as we are already starting some of the planned activities in the community. In addition to that, I would like to reiterate my previous invitation to you to call either_____ or me at any time should you need to express some observations or questions with respect to the results I am enclosing.

Thank you again for your contribution to this project, and most of all for your openness and willingness to share your experiences with us. You contributed greatly to our understanding of the needs refugee families have in Canada. I hope the final outcome of this research and action process is going to give assurance to all who participated that we belong to a caring and responsive community ready to mobilize its resources toward meeting the needs of its children.

Sincerely,

Danijela Seskar-Hencic

FEEDBACK TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (ESL TEACHERS)

Logo
(for ESL teachers)

May 15, 1996.

Dear

Several months have past since the meeting where we talked about your work with children affected by war trauma. As I promised then, I am getting back to you with some of the preliminary results based on completed data collection. In addition to the input from your group, the summary that I am enclosing consists of contributions made by refugee families and their children, as well as input from the local working group that has been active in addressing the issue of children affected by war trauma. At this time, I would also like to reiterate my previous invitation to you to call me at any time should you wish to express any observations or questions with respect to the results I am enclosing.

On a more personal note, I wish to express again how much I have appreciated your cooperation and willingness to share your experiences. I hope that your enthusiasm and creativity in meeting the needs of new Canadian children attending our schools get wider recognition in this community.

Thank you again for your contribution to this project. I hope the final outcome of this research and action process brings assurance to all of you who participated that we belong to a caring and responsive community willing to mobilize its resources toward meeting the needs of its refugee children.

Sincerely,

Danijela Seskar-Hencic

NEW IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AFFECTED BY WAR TRAUMA
Community Needs and Resources Assessment

Summary of the preliminary results and recommendations

The goal of this action research project was to provide a basis for, and facilitate development of strategies and programs that will be based on actual life experiences of families and their children in the KW community and on the present needs and resources in the community.
Two major objectives emerging from this goal were:
a. To hear what is the lived experience of families and their children, and
b. To develop a community perspective to the issues of the refugee families and their children by obtaining input from the community stakeholders.

Community and Research Update. Although the research is primarily oriented toward collection of the information, it has also been at the same time complemented by action planning and implementation organized by the Working Group for New Canadian Children Survivors of Collective Trauma. The group has been operating in this community for over a year now and has engaged in number of activities aimed at raising awareness of refugee children issues. In addition to that, the group is currently working on organizing and coordinating use of the existing resources in the community that have the capacity to provide additional support to refugee children. Enclosed is the list of educational and people resources produced for both individual community members and service providers. Also enclosed is the invitation pamphlet for the upcoming conference on Survivors of Trauma and Torture, that is partially sponsored by this working group and is taking place on May 31, 1996 at the Conrad Grable College.

Results

Family and Children Interviews. Three cultural assistants conducted interviews in their mother tongue with three refugee families and their children-from Somalia, Kurdistan, and Bosnia. The cultural assistants also contributed to this section of results.

Despite the fact that the three families have significantly different experiences of war and refugeeism, they indicated a number of common feelings and issues. All three families think nostalgically about the times before war broke out in their countries. They see their former lives as far more fulfilling then ones they have here and now. The testimonies of trauma of war showed that it occurred in several stages. Initially, chaotic events of war produced disbelief, and to some extent denial, but soon forced families to turn to an immense struggle to preserve what was left of their lives. For all of them that meant surviving by struggling to meet basic, existential needs throughout the extended period of time, which for some lasted up to three years. In Somalia, war changes were sudden and brutal, leaving no time for planning the flight. For Kurdish people in Iraq, destruction of

the whole ethnic group was clearly foreseen, so our family survived several bombardments during their refugee ordeal. The story from Bosnia tells us about courage and perseverance under pressures for ethnic cleansing that lasted for over a year before it was clear that leaving was unavoidable. Journeys that these families endured after deciding to leave brought great hopes for salvation but also created tremendous suffering and humiliation.

Throughout the time of war exposure and refugee ordeal, children suffered distress that took shape of depressive symptoms such as feelings of helplessness, accompanied with constant crying, insecurity and irritability, nightmares, bedwetting and various somatic problems. Sudden and extremely shocking events produced convulsions, prolonged state of shock, and numerous fears among children. Experiences in transition contributed to the continuation of some of the symptoms, although most of the children proved to be very resilient and managed to overcome initial experiences.

The new life in Canada brought peace and safety but very little beyond that. Dreams came true only in terms of satisfying most of the basic needs. The rest, and in particular needs for social support and recognition, as well as the need for meaningful employment for parents remained unmet. Children suffer from social isolation too. All of the families identified that getting adjusted to a new life is much harder since they are still mourning. Separation from extended family is one of the most significant contributors to this process, together with grieving for their lost homes and land. Fortunately, children and families from their own cultural group proved to be one of the most reliable sources of support. Other sources of strengths that allow families and their children to cope with resettlement include within-the-family supports, supports from sympathetic and sensitive teachers and peers and those provided by caring settlement service providers. Lack of language skills, and lack of support from the mainstream culture, and covert and overt racism, sometimes force children to think that they are too different to be accepted. For some children, the gap in schooling that occurred due to war produces additional struggles in Canadian schools.

Interviewed families would like to have more friends among Canadians, as well as their children to be accepted and respected for their endurance and resilience. They hope for more opportunities for socializing within and outside of the school for their children. Also with respect to school, they feel more should be done with anti-racism and cross-cultural sensitivity education. In order to relieve their children from inappropriate responsibility of interpreting for them, parents wish they could have an accessible and quality interpretation when communicating with their children's teachers. In addition to that, they think that this community needs to know more about how wars really affect people and what affects their lives in resettlement. Finally, parents wish their numerous skills and experiences could be recognized and better utilized in this society.

Focus Group Interview with ESL teachers. Two focus group interviews held with elementary and high school ESL teachers contributed to the detailed elaboration of coping strategies children use in schools, as well as illuminating roles the ESL teachers have with

respect to education of the refugee children. Beside being educators, the ESL teachers see themselves as providing settlement assistance, emotional supports, and quite often crisis intervention to their students.

Teachers identified several coping styles they see in refugee children. Most of the children rely on their positive experiences from the past and have tendency to suppress the negative ones. In addition to that, they tend to actively seek supports from own ethnic group within the school setting. Also very frequently used coping strategy is focusing on learning, although it is sometimes accompanied with isolation from others. Displaying resistance, acting outs, and finally, in some instances, withdrawal, are identified as some of the least effective strategies. The ESL teachers are working hard on trying to assist in children's integration into the school setting. Sport events, recitals, presentations and other forms of organized activities that actively include refugee children in school's life proved to be fulfilling efforts.

Teachers are aware that family supports play one of the crucial roles in children's integration. They report that a number of challenges that families face, such as initial separation of parents and adjustment to reunification in resettlement after several years, lack of work, settlement barriers, cultural shock, and finally lack of language skills, affect their students' integration to a great extent.

Teachers also feel that some of the basic needs of refugee families are not satisfied. Therefore, they recommend that priority should be given to satisfying those, followed by provision of meaningful social supports in the community. Communication between schools and families also needs to improve. In addition to that, anti-racism education and cross-cultural dialogue are also seen as needed in order to overcome prejudices of the hosting culture. Finally, teachers felt that both their own cultural group and the community at large should play more active role in assisting refugee families.

Recommendations for action. Based on the information obtained from several sources including: refugee families and their children, the ESL teachers, settlement workers and the Working Group for children Survivors of Collective Trauma, the following action steps were identified to take place in the community to provide alleviation of problems that new Canadian children face, and establish or enhance those structures that constitute natural supports for them. The coordinator and repository of these activities would be the previously mentioned working group since it includes representation of all major stakeholders in the community.

1. Utilize existing resources in the community for the purpose of organizing and providing awareness raising workshops for caregivers who are in contact with refugee families.

2. Develop a bibliography of reading resources on theory and practice as well as community perspective pertinent to the war trauma in children.

3. Lobby with existing community groups and organizations who deal with children to recognize the impact of the war trauma on families' and their children's lives.

4. Publicize actions related to recognition of children's experiences, such as workshops, lectures, seminars, conferences, and those community events that involve participation from refugee groups, including ones organized by local schools.

5. Develop a resource package on existing community supports.

6. Collect resources relevant to the historical, political and cultural background of the newcomer refugees to be used by care providers.

7. Develop a list of individuals, groups, and organizations who may provide direct supports to survivors and care providers.

8. Advocate for inclusion of all teachers in education on refugee children issues, anti-racism and promotion of cultural diversity.

9. Organize workshops, lectures, seminars and other forms of an on-going education for care providers in the community on the issues of effects of war and refugee trauma.

10. Utilize expertise of foreign trained professionals and non-professionals who have experience assisting refugee population.

11. Collect, develop or adapt existing, culturally appropriate techniques and tips to assist caregivers and teachers that will allow for expression of feelings an alleviate symptoms of trauma in children. Spontaneous initiatives facilitated by the ESL teachers, preschool workers and children themselves could provide the stepping stone for those.

12. Encourage organizing individual and group supports such as self-help, parenting and discussion groups for parents as well as play and/or art-performing groups for children.

13. Ensure good quality orientation and guidance to newcomers throughout initial settlement together with continuous advocacy from the part of settlement agencies.

14. Lobby with pre-employment support groups to facilitate job finding process for refugees.